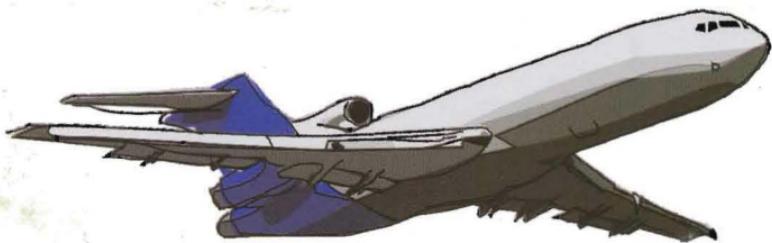


LEAVING IT BEHIND



JOHN W. McCOY

"Gripping and hard to put aside, I was drawn effortlessly into the action which traverses the international financial centers and involves the unsavory world of the drug cartels."

--Ruth Downing

"This book was very engaging and hard to put down, from my own personal experience of working and living in Vietnam. John McCoy has a very good understanding of the various cultures of the Vietnamese people and their willingness to accept life as it is."

--Father Charlie Robak, Hanoi, Vietnam

Under the guidance of Retired General Alexander Sloan and The Foundation, "culture-hero" Jonathan Langston and his Vietnamese friend, Quan, fight to destroy the drug cartels, set up during the Vietnam War, which are trying to control the banking industry in Vietnam and other countries, including America. Factored into the equation is Tuyet, a woman Jon rescued from rape and death when she was a young girl. After years of denying their destiny, and after years of loneliness and unhappiness, Jon swears that this mission for the general will be the last, so that he and Tuyet can be together.

What he and Quan, and his army of mountain soldiers, the Montagnards, don't count on is betrayal by top government officials and the kidnapping of Anh Phon, Tuyet, and the general. Only through Jon's shrewd thinking, and the help of his friends, is he able to save those who mean the most to him, so that he can strive to leave his former life behind and begin a new one with Tuyet.

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'LEAVING IT BEHIND'

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To be published soon by John W. McCoy
Hidden Money

Soon available:
The Users
The Chief
The Road to Nowhere

**LEAVING
IT
BEHIND**

John W. McCoy

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Ruth Downing, the one person who showed me how to look at life on its own terms and to learn to live with myself on a daily basis. She was always there to listen and to give guidance. For that gift, I will be eternally grateful – each day of my life.

This book is also dedicated to my sons, Stephane, Eric and Alexis McCoy and to my daughter, Sophie McCoy, who chose the title without realizing it, as they understood how their father lived his life in his professional world, often at odds with his personal world.

There are many people who deserve gratitude and thanks for providing the inspiration to look at life on its own terms. They provided the stories and defined their own experiences in dealing with complicated and challenging events of their lives on each and every day.

This story had to be told but it is fictional to protect the innocent and not so innocent.

Foreword

John McCoy is a person with a dream of telling the story of the people he came to know and love from the past to the present. He understands the various cultures of the Vietnamese people and he understands the difficulties of their survival after a horrifyingly destructive conflict growing out of a monstrous lie called the Vietnam War.

He was working in Vietnam when he started writing this book and I became his sounding board for ideas. Many of the characters are based on the lives of real people, their dreams, hopes and struggles to survive. But the one thing that the author has been able to capture in this book is the acceptance of the people, and the willingness of the people to look at life on its own terms in the aftermath of war.

As chapter after chapter left the keyboards of creativity, I came to understand the importance of the story, and of the people being portrayed. The Montagnards are real and little is known to the outside world about these warriors. The author knew them and respected them for who are. More importantly, he respected their past.

This book, although imaginary, was created to portray people and events as possibly seen in the real world. The plots and subplots are based on greed casting a shadow over the reputation of bankers, and the setup of the drug cartels emanating from the Vietnam War and through the Golden Triangle.

Only time will tell if the bankers were part of the plot coming out of the war that damaged the lives of so many people.

Ruth Downing

Introduction

Several years ago, I was on an assignment in Vietnam for one of the Donor organizations looking at the transition of the economy and banking system. As I traveled around the country, I spoke with many people about their lives today and the struggles they had had coming out of the Vietnam War. I became intrigued with the lives of the people, their honesty and acceptance of the past. "Things happened for a reason," they would tell me. "Today we must accept what happened and get on with living."

The courage I found with the Vietnamese, both in the north and in the south, pointed me in a direction of creating a story about these proud people. They have had struggles, but they face each day with new hopes. This book is fiction. The characters are based on a multitude of characters in real life. The Vietnamese people that I met with frequently were open with the stories of the past and they were able to relate the events of the past emanating from the war days with the present. Their stories captured my imagination as I sat up at night letting the fingers do the writing.

This book became an extension of my life as I lived and worked with the people. As they told me their stories, I felt a closeness that is seldom found in other cultures.

Leaving it Behind is fiction but the situations created in this book can apply to each of us.

John W. McCoy
24 January 2004

Prologue

THE FRECKLED FACED SIX-YEAR OLD BOY threw his small push plough to the side, crushing a few grown tomato vines in its path. He scrambled across the rows, dodging the plants as he ran. He raced to the edge of the field, leaving the damage behind, forgotten in his haste to reach freedom. Under a solitary tree at the edge of the crop, he reached down without breaking the stride of his skinny little legs, to pick up his abandoned shoes, his only pair for the year and his most prized possession.

The boy looked up in the distance as the school bus slowly inched its way down the dirt road, kicking up the clouds of dust behind the four tires as it moved pass the farmhouses, collecting the kids for the first day of school.

He raced down the path, hoping to pass the house without being noticed, without being yelled at for not finishing his work. His mind had been racing that morning since he first woke up. Silently, he had crept out of the house to do his regular morning chores. The sun had broken the tree line, cascading its glow into the valley as he gathered the eggs from the chicken coop. He could see the other farms in the distance. He knew there was no violence at those farms, only at his.

He had a dreadful fear that one of his parents would come out of the door, starting the drunken yelling from the night before, telling him how useless he was, and adding more work to a longer list. He

Leaving It Behind

was the oldest of five, and he was expected to work. That was the job of the first-born, he was often told.

Little Jonathan Langston cleared the house safely; his long brown hair buffeted by the breeze as he drew near the creek. His dark brown eyes flashed with the joy of leaving an unhappy place. A place where there were always arguments and fights over who was more important, always waxed with the slurry of booze and blame. Jonathan was

happy about leaving his parents, happy about escaping the hostility, and happy about finding his freedom that he had heard existed in the schools through reading and discovery of the world.

As he jumped the creek, he swore that when he was fourteen years old that he would be leaving for good, and he would never return. He would find his freedom and make a reputation for himself. He didn't need people like them for parents. He jumped the last ditch before he reached the dirt road, slipping on the moist edge, almost falling backwards.

He heard an angry voice yelling at him from the house. Once again reciting the drunken words that he had heard often in his short memory.

"Hey, you rotten kid! Where in do you think you're going? You've got work to do!" Letting out a screech, the voice gave its final blow. "You come back, you lazy bum!"

Jonathan turned his head quickly to see if he was being chased, noticing that the bus was slowing down to pick him up. The dust was gathering behind it in a wave moving towards the front, hiding the driver's smiling face. The driver knew what was happening; everyone in the farming community knew about his family. He darted in front of the moving yellow bus as it stopped, shouting back to his drunken father who was weaving precariously on the edge of the terrace.

"The work is finished, Papa. I'll finish my other chores when I come home from school. Today is my first day at school," he shouted proudly as the driver closed the door behind him, and pulling his straw hat over his eyes, he began smiling as the bus drove away. The bus backfired a few times, over the roar of the eight-cylinder engine

as the bus pulled away, drowning out any noise from the outside. The dust curled its way upward behind the bus as it made its way through the cotton fields on both sides of the road.

He walked slowly down the long aisle to find a seat, looking out the window at his father shaking his fist defiantly at him, unable to hear his words. He knew that he would have a difficult time when he came home, but so be it, he thought. At least, he was free.

FORTY YEARS LATER, Jonathan Langston sat quietly looking at George Street in Sydney from the third floor office window. He thought about that day so many years ago when he had made his dash for freedom, leaving his home and parents, feeling a sensation of relief. Many things had happened since that day to bring him to where he was now. Fortunes had been made, and lost, for him and others, mostly large companies, spread around the world.

He had made a reputation for himself, and his talents were often in demand. But as he sat smiling and feeling the relief, he knew it was time to quit, to leave that world behind. Jonathan Langston had been leaving things behind all his life but always for a reason and without regrets.

As he sat massaging the instrument on his knees, watching the street below, he thought about the woman with him last night. At one point, she was to be a permanent part of his life, but something went wrong for her. She had decided that she wanted more adventure, more excitement in her life, and didn't want to continue a relationship with him, if he was leaving his profession of moving around the globe, taking on impossible assignments; assignments which were always financed by the clients—his clients. She wanted more, and he was prepared to leave her silently for her own reasons.

Their lovemaking was always good; but last night was the best; full of passion realizing that this would be their last time together. There was a deep understanding between them as their bodies clung to each other, searching for a deeper meaning to continue together; but they both knew it wouldn't work for them. Their lovemaking

Leaving It Behind

lasted until the early hours of the morning, until the final climax and exhaustion drove them into a deep sleep.

He had awakened early, wrote a brief note, and left it on the table next to her bed. He had looked down at her lovely face. He smiled and at the same time he felt sadness as he turned slowly—leaving her apartment forever—another woman left behind. His travels following his profession around the world had never allowed him time to remain in one place long enough to form a permanent relationship. Maybe things would change now, he thought. Only time would tell that story.

He waited for the final signal, knowing what was ahead, and happy that it would soon be over. It would become a memory mixed with all the other memories of his life.

The radio receiver plugged into his ear buzzed.

"Yes?" was all he needed to say. His keen eyes were riveted on the building across the street waiting to give the "go" signal.

"Ils s'en vont, maintenant."

"Merci, mon ami, et adieu."

"Where are going from here, Jon? I hope to work with you again, my friend," said the accented voice.

"Sorry, my friend. This is our last job together. Good luck with whatever you do. You have enough money to retire now. It'll be paid the usual way. It's now time for you to enjoy your family."

"What about your woman? Will she go with you?" He didn't say her name as he didn't like her and had always been honest with Jonathan about her.

"I left her this morning. You were always right about her, my friend. I was too blind about my feelings towards her. Love makes you blind, *n'est ce pas, mon ami?* She couldn't be trusted and thanks."

"Oui et adieu. Je m'en vais. Tu as deux minutes," he responded cutting the transmission.

Jonathan sat up straight, picking up the instrument of death. The high-powered .22 automatic rifle with the laser scope sitting gently on top. He aimed down the barrel through the sight using the cross hairs to adjust for the distance. He sat looking for his two targets, waiting

for them to leave the building. The memories of so many of these shootings went through his mind, and he had never gotten use to them. He hated pulling the trigger on a human, but it had been necessary each time. It was a job, and his profession. An occupation shoved on him by life, and he had chosen to live that way. He remembered the foul taste left in his mouth those many years ago when he pulled the trigger for the first time. It had never gotten easier, and the taste was always the same. He shifted his position and watched, smiling and feeling the tension go out of his body. It was now time to react clinically.

Far below, he saw them walking towards the street in deep conversation. They stopped, waiting for the lights to change, so they could cross.

The lights turned green for them. As their feet left the pavement, he squeezed the hair trigger twice in one-second intervals. The tranquilizer darts were set to release the drugs as they hit their bodies, leaving a small hole as they entered the upper torso, exploding inside, spreading the drugs throughout the bodies within seconds—instant paralysis for two hours.

It was over quickly. Two more bankers who had interfered with a government issued an order to capture them in public, and take them away for interrogation, to make an example of them for other ambitious power brokers. The bankers had tried to become a power beyond the government's plans. They had proclaimed power, better than their elected masters had and now they paid the price of public disclosure. The government needed to know the full scope of their deception, and they would find out in time.

Jonathan stood, looking down at the gathering crowd surrounding the two fallen bankers. Two ambulances arrived quickly as part of the plan; but the uniformed men were not with any medical rescue operation. Excited people gathered on the streets, asking questions receiving no answers, as the bankers were loaded heavily into the waiting vehicles, amber lights flashing.

It was all part of the plan, perfectly organized by a professional. And to the professionals, Jonathan Langston was known as the pro-

Leaving It Behind

fessional. It had taken less than a minute before the ambulances drove away.

He walked out the door leaving the weapon behind. Leaving evidence pointing to another organization. Leaving enough information to remove any involvement of his client, pointing the finger to the bankers – the corrupters of society.

Five minutes later, Jonathan walked slowly down George Street, passing the speculating crowd that was watching the ambulance disappear around the corner in the distance. He turned his head slightly to look at them, smiling at the unspoken question. The plan had worked, and he could now leave it all behind.

He was a free man again, just like the time when he made that mad dash for the school bus all those many years ago. The next escape to freedom was when he was fourteen years old, as he had planned, away from the terror of his parents.

But it was not over. He needed to go back in time to where it all started those many years ago. Back to where he had started pulling the triggers, where he became part of the manipulation, and where he had set up a sequence of events that had controlled him and his life. It was time to quit and to unravel the original snake. His destiny was now dragging him back into Asia where the political stratagem was born and used against the bankers with their help and their greed. He knew how it started. He was there at its creation at the end of the Vietnam War.

This was his only solution to find peace within himself.

ONE

EXPLOSIONS COULD BE HEARD IN THE DISTANCE; smoke poured from buildings as fire spread through the carcasses of shantytowns built along the Saigon River. People fled the devastation that was spreading around the streets, trying desperately to escape the onslaught of the dreaded Vietcong. The last of the Americans were evacuating downtown Saigon, helicopters racing into action, pouring rounds of automatic fire at the advancing troops; tanks rattled down the streets firing indiscriminately at anything that showed resistance. The Air Calvary was preparing to flee to the coast after all the Americans were out of danger. It was a fight to the end.

Saigon was falling and the Americans were leaving quickly, taking anything they could, destroying what they couldn't. Desperate South Vietnamese pleaded in the streets to go with the retreating soldiers, begging to be rescued and flown to safety in another country.

A tall civilian raced across the wide street near the river dressed in worn clothing; dressed like the people fleeing the destruction. His dark brown wavy hair was long, dropping to his shoulders from under the visor cap shielding his dark brown eyes. The man's movements were quick, showing that he was in top physical condition.

He shouted encouragement to the people to escape to the Delta, escape by any means possible. The war was over and they needed to live. He shouted in their language as he ran across the street, as shells

Leaving It Behind

pelted the pavement behind him, a few hitting a small group of unlucky people who died without a chance.

The man continued running, dodging and ducking into alleys. He was running from the advancing enemy troops to reach a rendezvous with an American general before he could disappear into the bush to start that long journey to Laos on foot. He had to reach the final destination, which would take a long time, if he survived. Fear chased him through the alleys, stopping him several times as he helped children to their feet, pushing them ahead into a safe passageway through the burning buildings. He shouted encouragement to the youngsters as they ran.

The general needed to agree to the final plan, a long-range strategy that they had been working on for five years. And he had the final key to success, if he lived to pull it off, but he had to get out of Saigon and fast.

He charged into an alley as bricks toppled around him, a shell exploding over his head. He ducked his head out of reflex. Five minutes to go, and fifteen minutes with the man before the general was carried away to safety by a helicopter, which would come in at an exact moment. Timing was crucial in the next few minutes.

Jonathan Langston stopped at the corner of the narrow alley. He stood, looking across the wide street, to be sure that it was safe to make the run. He could see the general sitting in the back of a small street restaurant, the only customer left. The man was dressed in dirty civilian clothes and sat watching the activities around him, trying to remain out of sight. The owner had abandoned his business. Most people had left their businesses for the safety out of Saigon. The American military command had issued orders to evacuate, to abandon the South Vietnamese. Military aircraft could be seen climbing to safe altitudes loaded with the remaining civilians and military personnel. Aircraft departures were continuous; a mixture of military and civilian jets disappearing into the clouds above *Tan Son Nhat* air base, a constant blast of noise from jet engines screeching upwards to safety. After the last plane out, the military would abandon the base, Saigon and South Vietnam. The war was over for the Americans.

But the reckless living would continue for Jonathan Langston who would make his way north on foot or by any means he could. His fears would follow him. The journey would take weeks. But he had time, the resources, the language skills, and contacts along the long road. After the next few minutes, he didn't need the Americans. And he would be leaving more memories behind; buried in the past as most of his other memories.

He looked around and walked across the street towards the lone man sitting in the deserted restaurant. He reached the curb and walked silently to the side, listening intently to the distant explosions. He watched the man as he turned to look at him, his hand moving slowly under the table. Langston spoke softly to the tall man with sunken eyes under short gray hair.

"Don't move too quickly, General. Things are making me a little nervous here. Let us talk, and I'll leave quickly. You have just a few minutes before the chopper comes in."

"Okay, Jon," he replied as he smiled at the younger man. He motioned to a chair at the front of the table. Langston walked to the back and sat with his back against the wall, facing the street. His safety was against the wall, a clear view of street and the back exit door to his left. He had been in this situation before, too many times to think about. He was being cautious, and he knew that he couldn't trust the man in front of him. He knew that if the general felt threatened, his life would be over. The general only cared about himself and the future rewards totaling millions of dollars in greenbacks if the operation was set up correctly. But it would take years before they saw the full benefits of the plan.

Jonathan looked at the old man and smiled. He watched the streets and started talking quickly, leaving out no detail, and making sure that the general understood every element of the plan. Finally, he sat back and smiled.

The old man spoke slowly, explaining his position carefully. He looked up quickly hearing the rotating blades of a helicopter descending near the plaza. He stood up. Without wasted motions, the meeting over.

Leaving It Behind

He said to the younger man as he started for the door, "Jon, I agree with your plan. I'll take care of my side of the operation. You're to be careful and contact me when you can. You know the sequence," he yelled as he reached the door, pausing to look at the dark camouflaged aircraft settling to earth like a slug.

"In three months, ten million US dollars will be deposited to your account in Singapore from the secret funds. You're to use them wisely. We're counting on your success, and good luck, my young friend," he said as he ran out the door without looking back.

Langston watched the older man run towards the helicopter, disappearing into the darkened recesses, as the craft climbed away from its unprotected position.

The helicopter disappeared behind some tall buildings in the distance as it made its way toward the airport. Jon heard machine gunfire in the direction of the fleeing helicopter. He turned quickly and opened the exit door, disappearing down the narrow alley that would take him to safety in the parks beyond the city. Saigon was now to become a memory of the past for a few years, but Jonathan knew he would be returning one day. He was leaving something behind that he wanted and needed. And the sweet taste of revenge permeated his taste buds. She would have waited for him—waited until it was safe for both of them to be together. But they had different ideas. He would find them someday and their death would be slow for what they did to *Lan*. They would scream for mercy.

His smile radiated as he picked up the long distance sprinter's gait. He ran down the long alley, feeling the hot humid breeze buffeting his hair, sensing the moisture on his skin as he paced himself for the long run. In a few hours, nightfall would close in, and he had along way to go. The noise from the street fighting in downtown Saigon was receding. His memories went back briefly to when he was a child, to his dash for freedom at the age of fourteen. He had raced through a similar corridor to freedom, to the excitement of what was ahead of him.

JONATHAN LANGSTON RACED DOWN THE DIRT PATH as fast as his legs would carry him. He smiled as he ran, feeling the freedom of being in the forest alone with nature. He was protected here and he could remain here for days or until he was safe. The branches of the smaller trees slapped his face and chest as he chased the bends in the path. The noise from his father's voice receded; the firing of the shotgun became less frequent, the pellets no longer bouncing off the trees over his head as he ran. He ran straight ahead, not breaking his speed. He was in his home, his forest, and he felt no fear.

It had been a narrow escape when his father, in a drunken state, saw him carrying his small backpack out the back door of the house heading across the fields toward the forest.

Clyde Langston had jumped from his chair in his protected corner overlooking the fields beyond, knocking over his bottle of bourbon. He looked at the liquid spilling to the floor and became angrier. He grabbed the bottle to save the last of his precious supply, placing it gently in the cupboard to hide it from his wife who would be sleeping for a few more hours. The other children were parked safely with her parents at their farm in the next valley. But he was angry that the fourteen-year-old brat was heading for the forest to find escape from doing the chores around the farm. As he grabbed the shotgun over the doorway, he wavered on shaky feet several times, shaking his head to clear his vision; his eyes were blurred with the after effects of too much bourbon.

Clyde stood to his full six-foot height, turned quickly, and raced out the back door to fire a warning shot at his son, who was now at the protective edge of the forest. He aimed over his head, realizing that the pellets would shatter through the leaves with a racket, maybe forcing the boy to stop. But the youngster disappeared into the woods like a rabbit diving into his burrow. This made Clyde angrier, and he started running after his son, slowly at first, and then gathering speed shaking off the dull headache pounding in his forehead.

He fired the double-barreled shotgun at intervals, reloading as he ran, pulling the cartridges from his pockets, and ejecting the spent

cartridges on the ground. His anger was growing; the killing rage was forcing him on. He reached the edge of the forest without slowing and drove his heavy body into the dense undergrowth. He felt the branches scraping and tearing at his skin, blood slowly seeping through the shirt, which made him angrier as he ran. A smaller man could make speed on the trail, but he needed to crouch over as he ran, which increased the pounding of his headache. About a kilometer into the forest, he stopped where the worn path split.

Clyde stood listening for noise and looking in both directions wondering which path the boy had taken. His heavy breathing came out in tortured gulps. He looked down at the trails, trying to find marks or a sign in the dirt of a small footprint or a piece of grass bent over from foot pressure in the boy's haste to escape work. This was not the first time that the boy had pulled this stunt, and he was now determined to catch him and punish him severely, to teach him a lesson about obedience.

The father reached into his pocket and retrieved the flask that was always in his jacket. He twisted the cap slowly and lifted the bottle to his lips. He felt the sensation of the liquid draining down his throat to his stomach. He capped the bottle and put it in his pocket feeling the sense of calmness flow through his body. He lifted the shotgun and swung it over his shoulder and headed towards the river about a half a mile away. He kept watching for signs along the trail, hoping to see a sign to confirm that the boy had passed that direction. He knew that the kids played there often, and they had built little cubby houses playing their childish games. He would probably find the boy somewhere close. He would not waste too much more time as he needed to go to town to buy some supplies, another bottle, and make himself scarce before the old lady woke up demanding his attention. He smiled thinking about the other woman in town. She needed his attention far more than the brat's mother did. But the boy needed to be taught a lesson, if he could find him.

Langston turned the bend in the trail, hearing the cascading water in the distance tumbling down the gorge. He shuffled his feet, peering up ahead hoping to get a glimpse of the boy, hoping to catch him un-

aware of his presence. If he caught him, he would grab him by the cuff of his neck and drag him home by his head of hair, and then beat the hell out of him for running away from him. He walked slowly keeping his eyes focused for movements in the distance. Birds flurried in the treetops as he approached the banks of the river. He started the downhill walk, slipping on the moist ground catching him at the last minute before he slid into the freezing water. He stood up slowly and wiped the mud from the shotgun barrel, failing to realize that when he slipped, the mussel of the gun had buried itself in the mud.

He walked to the water's edge and looked around deciding to continue across on the rocks to the other side and follow the trail further. As he crossed, his foot slipped, and he tumbled into the river landing on his back. But his instinct or quick reaction forced him to hold the gun in the air, keeping it out of the water. He needed the gun in case he saw the boy and needed to fire a warning shot. He didn't want to shoot at the boy, but he would if it was necessary to stop him.

He stood and walked slowly in the waist deep freezing water. It was reviving him and he could feel the urge for another quick shot from his flask in his jacket. He reached the bank, climbed out, and crawled to the top of the bank. He sat and looked around, breached the shotgun, checking to be sure that the cartridge was dry. He re-loaded and laid the weapon on the ground next to him carefully and pulled out his bottle.

He sat for ten minutes, sipping the precious liquid unaware that higher on the hill he was being watched. His every move was being calculated, and eyes were glued to the deadly instrument on the ground.

Clyde stood, feeling the sensation of the liquid in his bloodstream. He turned and started his walk up the hill, following the path, carefully keeping his eyes open for any movement.

He followed the path to the crest of the hill and was ready to start down the other side when a quick movement ten meters away crashed through the bush. He raised the gun, yelling as he pulled both triggers on the double-barreled shotgun. Clyde Langston died two seconds after he pulled the triggers as the metal breach drove its way into his

brain and out the back of his head. He was dead before he hit the ground, as the noise of crashing bushes receded in the distance.

JONATHAN LANGSTON paced himself as he made his way out of Saigon. The last day of April 1975, and this ridiculous war was over. And for him, it was a new start in life. He ran on towards the darkness, stopping only when he saw crowds of people, avoiding the crowded areas. He needed to reach Cambodia in a few days and head north along the border until he reached the capital of Laos. He knew he had time, and he would take his time after tomorrow. At the age of twenty-six, he was in superb physical condition. He could keep this pace going for hours, stopping only for brief periods to doze and eat. In the background, he could still hear the distant noise of the bombs and automatic fire. But the longer he ran, the less he could hear of the sharp cracks of exploding shells. The noise of the fighting was receding into history for him.

As he ran, feeling the breeze from the Mekong Delta floating across his forehead, he remembered the days of his childhood, his escape from his father on the banks of the river. He rubbed the scars on his shoulder that he carried from the pallets of the shotgun blast when he ran into the woods behind his home to escape. He had continued running without looking back, taking a smaller path which lead him to the river's edge 500 meters below the normal crossing. There were no rapids, and he swam the river, mostly underwater to avoid being seen. He had stopped to rest at the top of the hill, looking down at the rapids as his father crossed, and fell into the water. He remembered turning and running in the opposite direction for his return trip home to retrieve his small bag with his only possessions. He had heard the shotgun blast just after his father yelled, but he didn't slow up in fear of being hit again by pellets.

Young Jonathan had continued his run until he had reached the grove where his small bag was hidden. He had retrieved it quickly and continued running to the next village ten kilometers away where he had arranged to stay with family friends until he moved on.

As Jonathan trotted through the Delta area, he remembered those days with sadness. It was two weeks later when he had been told of his father's death by a shooting accident, about his burial and his mother moving in with her parents to seek medical help for her drinking problem. His brothers and sisters stayed with the grandparents, and it was only years later that he would see them again. Will I be running for the rest of my life, he wondered as the darkness along the river closed in on him. He shook the sadness from his mind, watching for any movement of people on the road ahead.

The sun was setting, darkness closing in. There was another kilometer to cover before he crossed the bridge heading for *Quan*'s village, his friend, who would hide him for a few hours before heading north. He had known *Quan* since he arrived in Vietnam, and they had operated together, never questioning each other, always there to help each other. He started around the last bend in the road before he would see the bridge. Saigon was fifteen kilometers behind him, and he needed to rest, needed time to think and talk with his friend. They needed time to make plans and for *Quan* to contact some people in the North.

Jonathan watched the road as he trotted. About one hundred meters ahead, military trucks loaded with troops started pulling out on the main road. Jon took in the scene quickly, lifting his pack from his shoulders moving to the side of the road in the shadows. His eyes stayed glued on the convoy and at the last moment as the lead truck turned into the main road, Jonathan dove down the bank towards the river hoping that they had not seen him. He rolled and with the down-hill movement, he picked up speed. He slid, his pack dragging behind him in his left hand. He bounced against a mangrove tucked on the bank of the river, jarring him to a stop. He rolled quickly to get out of sight of the road, to hide. He rolled behind the tall grass on the bank and stopped on his back with his head pointing to the roadway, his eyes looking up. He wondered if they had seen him, priming his ears for noise of troops searching the area. He could see the top of the road from his position behind the grass; he pulled his bag closer.

He heard the trucks slowing down, shouts from a voice of authority to search the riverbanks ahead and to shoot anyone on sight. Jonathan shifted his head slightly to see how far he was from the river, his only avenue of escape. He reached into his bag and pulled out the silenced automatic with the fourteen round clip. He turned slowly, raising himself quietly to look at the road above, and froze. The noise that penetrated his ears was far deadlier than the troops above.

Jonathan turned his head slowly, twisting his left hand with the automatic level pointed awkwardly towards the sparkling emerald eyes staring at him above the hood. The Cobra was moving to the side slowly, and then took a slight movement backwards, poised to strike. Reflexes pulled the trigger as the hood moved forward; the head disappeared before Jonathan's eyes. The six-foot body of the Cobra jerked over Jonathan's legs in the snake's death throws. Jonathan bit into his lower lip, forcing himself not to scream. The movements of the Cobra's body stopped.

Jonathan reached down with his right hand and pulled the dead body off his legs, shaking from the fear of the snake. He had forgotten momentarily the enemy troops somewhere above on the road. He looked up to see the heads of soldiers walking along the side of road, some of them looking down the bank of the river, but not suspecting anyone in the area, not hearing any noise from the death struggle below. Jonathan looked around slowly, searching for a playmate of the monster beside him. He hated snakes and had a massive respect and fear of the devils.

The troops continued down the road, the noise receding. He rose to his feet slowly, crouched over, and started walking down the bank towards the bridge. He walked carefully keeping his eyes pinned to the roadway above looking for any movements. He carried the automatic in his left hand prepared to use it. He walked up to the bridge through the mangroves, wading into water up to his knees. He walked past two pylons on the bridge and fired two rapid shots at the two soldiers standing ten feet away with their weapons raised, ready to fire. The .45 hollow-nosed bullets slammed into their bodies at one-

second intervals, knocking them off their feet. They died before they hit the ground.

Jonathan walked up towards them cautiously, looking around slowly for other movements under or near the bridge. He kneeled down beside the soldiers and felt a terrible dread, a sense of guilt and remorse. They were only kids, no more than fifteen years old, fighting a war for reasons that they did not understand. And they had died never knowing why they were fighting.

Jonathan shook his head in sadness, wanting to shout at the stupidity of it all. These babes had no chance, he thought, as he pulled their bodies above the waterline of the river. He looked at them one last time as he waded into the water, keeping low and in the shadows of the bridge. The breeze floating gently across the water brought only temporary relief. The sadness followed Jonathan as he lifted his pack above his head to keep it dry. He needed to reach *Quan* and make plans. They needed to talk.

HE SAW THE VILLAGE AHEAD. Lights could be seen, but there were very few people walking on the dirt streets. Jonathan needed to reach the far end of the village where he would find *Quan*, waiting with a small boat to take them up the Mekong in a few hours. He passed houses where whispering voices could be heard, and cooking odors floated in the air from charcoal burners hidden away in the small houses. No one ventured out from the protection of the village. The people had accepted that the war was over, but fear of what was ahead could be heard in their whispers.

He walked close to the shanty buildings, staying as much in the shadows as possible, wanting to avoid being seen, more for the protection of *Quan's* family than for himself. He reached the house at the end of a small alleyway facing the river and stopped.

Voices and sharp noises of flesh against flesh could be heard as he neared the end of the dirt path. Harsh questions were being asked in Vietnamese. Shouts of, "I don't know any Jonathan Langston" could be heard, as the noise of flesh being hit again and again resulted after each response.

Leaving It Behind

Jonathan walked slowly around the corner of the shack, facing the deck overlooking the river. The water flowed rapidly, bouncing the small boat repeatedly against the wooden pylons. There were three soldiers standing in front of *Quan* and his wife, who were both strapped to a pole. Each punishing blow from the uniformed soldier tore the ropes further into the flesh of *Quan's* hands, as he tried to stay on his feet. The senior soldier with two stars on his shoulder raised his hand again, shouting the same question. This time, he had a pistol in his hand, and he started the swing from the left side, crashing it heavily against *Quan's* face, causing blood to splatter down his chest.

Quan shook his head and glared at the soldier in hatred, starting to say something as the man pulled his hand back preparing for the next swing. He was smiling at *Quan*, enjoying the brutality of the torture, and not listening to the pleas of *Quan's* wife, *Anh Phon*.

Jonathan stepped out of the shadows as the two stars started the swing. He stopped; his mouth opened quickly in surprise, showing missing teeth as he stared at the ugly silencer of the automatic pointed at his head. The man tried to reverse the gun in his hand and died seconds after Jonathan pulled the trigger. He turned quickly as the two other soldiers were trying to lift their weapons, reacting slowly with the surprise of the intruder's appearance. They died before their guns reached their waistline.

Jon turned quickly and moved around the shack in the shadows, searching for other soldiers, before returning to *Quan* and his wife. He quickly cut the ropes from their wrists, helping them over to a corner near the boat floating in the water.

Jonathan wet a large towel and began wiping the blood from *Quan's* face, and turning to face *Anh Phon*, he asked gently.

"What happened? Why were these men here, and why were they looking for me? I've said nothing to anyone about coming in this direction and meeting with *Quan*."

"We don't know, Jon. They came in about thirty minutes ago and started demanding where you were. We denied any knowledge of your existence, until they showed us a letter in English from an

American POW who said that you were an agent working for the American government and operated out of this village against the Vietcong. We denied any knowledge. And that's when they tied us up, and the beatings started against poor *Quan* by that sadistic monster," she lamented, pointing towards the dead man with the two stars.

Jonathan continued washing *Quan's* face and slowly the young Vietnamese stood up, walking slowly over to the dead man. He started searching the pockets of two stars, pulling a piece of paper from his pocket, and handing it to his friend.

Jonathan read it slowly, recognizing the name of the man who had sent the letter to a General Thong of the North Vietnamese Army. His anger started to boil; his dark brown eyes grew darker with the rage flowing through him.

He turned to face *Quan* and *Anh Phon* saying. "You can't stay here. Pack what you can, and we'll leave quickly up the river. You'll be safer up North. We must leave now, my friends."

"Where are we going, Jon?" asked *Anh Phon*.

"We're heading for Laos. You'll be safer there, if we can get there without these idiots finding us. Now, let us get moving my friends," he said folding the letter and putting it into his pocket.

The small slim woman stood slowly, her legs unsteady, catching herself on the bamboo railing of the terrace before she fell. She looked at the tall foreigner who had been their friend for years, and who had just saved them from a certain brutal death. She reached over to take her husband's hand, leading him into the small house. At the doorway, she stopped and turned to face the younger man standing near the river, a worried look on his face.

"You know that man who wrote that letter, don't you, Jon?"

"Yes, and he is not a POW. He a rogue agent who has been operating on both sides of the line. He was setting up a new drug ring for the American mob the last time I saw him. He's French, and that's not his real name on the letter. We had set a trap for him two months ago, but he managed to escape."

Quan stood listening to the conversation between the two people he loved and asked between swollen lips, "Jon, do you know where this guy is?"

"Yes, in Laos. And that's where we're heading," he said, as he turned to get into the small boat to wait for his friends.

JONATHAN SAT SILENTLY in the boat, checking the supplies and fuel. He changed the magazine in his automatic and pulled the letter from his pocket, reading it again. He looked out over the river, watching the reflection of the moon appearing over the treetops, the mosquitoes buzzing around his head looking for fresh food. He placed the letter in his pack and left the boat silently. He had things to do and very little time before they left the village. He walked into the small house and told his friends what he had to do and quickly.

Jon left the terrace quickly and walked through the village, warning the inhabitants to flee tonight, to take what they could and head for the Delta in the South.

"Don't stay behind," he kept repeating. "The Cong are coming in truckloads, and some of them are already in the village."

He continued walking and pleading with the villagers. Some believed the foreigner who spoke their language; others ignored the *Tay* and continued whispering and cooking their meals.

Jonathan stopped at the end of the village. He turned slowly to head back towards *Quan's* house when he heard a scream from a young voice from the small shack about ten meters to his right. Was it a young girl or boy, he wondered as he started running in that direction with the automatic in his left hand, poised to fire.

The dirt path left no sound under his rubber-soled boots as he raced towards the small building. He slowed, easing himself into the shadows as the screams cascaded from the partially opened door. He looked cautiously into the dimly lit room and froze.

He was shocked at what was in the center of the small room. A man and woman were tied to chairs, held at gunpoint by a soldier in filthy clothes, who was watching his companions in the middle of the small room. He was smiling, turning occasionally to look at his pris-

oners and averting his eyes back to the scene. The couple was struggling against the ropes on their hands, the man trying desperately to remove the cloth from his mouth to scream for help from his neighbors.

The couple stared in anguish and helplessness as they watched the young girl of thirteen or fourteen held to the floor by four men. She struggled and screamed which excited their lusts more, a pack of wild dogs in for the blood sport and excitement.

One bloodshot-eyed soldier stood on her shoulders to hold the struggling girl pinned to the floor. Two men had her legs spread parallel to the floor. Her dress was above her head. Her lower body completely exposed, the tender age of youth, terrified as to what was happening. She struggled; they laughed, caught up in the excitement, unaware of Jonathan as he stepped into the room, firing one shot from the silenced automatic into the head of the man holding the couple at gunpoint.

He turned and fired, blowing the man standing on her shoulders against the wall. He twisted the gun slightly and fired two more rapid shots as the two men holding her legs released her and moved for their guns. They died before they touched the weapons. The man in front of the young girl turned, trying to stand. The tip of his tongue fell to the floor as Langston's boot found its way under the man's throat. Teeth shattered and the man fell backwards, the crack of the spine penetrating the confines of the room.

Jonathan turned quickly, his gun leveled, prepared for others. He turned, taking two steps and knelt beside the youngster, reaching over to pull her closer to his chest, trying to help her with tenderness, and not fear. She sobbed, and he held her gently until the sobbing slowed. He helped her to her feet, helping her to adjust her clothing to guard her dignity.

He reached up to her face gently touching the tears and saying, "It's okay now, my little friend. You're safe and that is all that matters. Help me with your parents and we'll leave here quickly. We must leave as it's not safe for anyone here."

He stood and walked with her to the couple. They uncoiled the ropes and removed the gags. The parents started talking, asking questions, concern for their daughter detected in their voices. Terror was written on their faces. They had endured a period of insanity and helplessness watching their daughter close to being raped by the soldiers, and they had been unable to help.

Jonathan picked up the young girl, her skinny arms draped around his shoulders, her trust in him absolute. He motioned for her parents to follow as he walked out to the path leading to the riverfront. Jonathan retraced his steps, holding the little girl against his chest, giving her reassurance. He told a few curious people who bothered to look outside their protective domain what had happened, encouraging them to leave the village for their own protection.

As he walked, he realized that something had happened to him back there. He had lost all emotion on the killing ground. He was sick of the cruelty, sick of the killings, and wanted to be as far away as possible. This girl clinging to his neck was half his age, and he had shot two boys not much older than her earlier. Two kids who followed orders blindly not understanding why they would die. He had killed the animals that were ready to commit the most indignant rage on a human possible, and he felt nothing. Where had this lack of emotion come from, he wondered, as he walked on to the terrace to see *Quan* and *Anh Phon* waiting for him in the boat. He said to them simply, "They're coming with us."

No reason was given, and none was necessary as *Quan* cranked the small engine into life. Jonathan placed the young girl in the bow, placing his pack behind her head. He motioned to her parents to sit beside her as he stepped out of the boat with *Anh Phon*, walking to the lower end of the terrace, and stepping into a second smaller boat, which had been concealed as a backup. He pulled the cord on the engine, and it jumped into life. He steered the wooden hull into the middle of the channel, picking up speed gradually to catch up with *Quan*, who was disappearing around the first bend in the river.

They had a long way to travel before they reached *Hong Ngu* on the Mekong River and turn north heading slowly into Cambodia and

then to Laos. Until they reached *Hong Ngu*, they would travel mostly at night to avoid any hostile and wandering eyes on the shorelines. Near the villages, they would be killing the small engines and paddling as fast as they could until they were reasonably safe.

"It's time for the long journey," he said to *Anh Phon* who shook her head in agreement. They trusted each other and the understanding between them was absolute.

"Yes, it will be a long journey. And we need to protect that little girl and get her and her parents safely out of this country. It's time to move, Jon. Together we can make it," she said sadly, looking affectionately at the tall foreigner with shoulder length hair and dark brown eyes, his skin burned nut brown from too many hours in the sun.

SEVERAL DAYS HAD PASSED SINCE THEIR ESCAPE from the madness in the small village fifteen kilometers outside Saigon. They had made their way up the Saigon River, disappearing into smaller channels, always watching for troop movements and anything that presented a threat to them. They moved in and out of channels, stopping only to rest and refueling the boats when it was necessary. They clung to the shorelines and waited in the smaller branches of the channels when the shore traffic became too heavy.

No one spoke, and they needed to remain as silent as possible. *Quan* stayed in the lead boat, pointing at directions and palms down when they needed to conceal themselves. At times, there were frantic movements of his hand as they plowed their way into the mangroves and waited. The journey was nerve-racking, but there was a purpose in their escape.

The parents of the little girl regained their strength and helped when they were told. They had lived through the ordeal; the youngster had survived only by the appearance of the tall foreigner who spoke their language, and who was always smiling and telling little stories to keep them entertained. His sense of humor was contagious which eased the hardship of the torturous journey.

On the third day, the little girl started moving around more. Her voice became more confident as she spoke, and occasionally she argued with the adults. She stayed in *Quan*'s boat trying to help him maneuver the bow through the channels. Several times, she had warned them of danger by waving her palms down, a sign she had seen *Quan* using with Jonathan. She was learning the tricks of traveling through dangerous territory in silence. But she stayed to herself most of the time when they were on shore at night. Jonathan knew that she needed to be alone, the healing process of her ordeal was taking place. He observed but said nothing. He spoke often, in guarded tones, with *Quan* and *Anh Phon* who watched over the youngster, giving her comfort at night when she cried coming awake from her nightmares.

The fourth day was an ordeal as they made the maddening dash through the marshlands heading for the Mekong River and then into Cambodia. They needed to cross the border at night as the Cambodian Army was on alert, trying to stop refugees fleeing from Vietnam into Cambodia. The boat occupants knew the risks; they were prepared for danger. Jonathan kept his automatic on his lap as he steered the small boat from one mangrove haven to the next. The American M16, which they had hidden in the boat months earlier lay on the floor, its magazine charged and safety off. *Quan* had the identical weapon ready to use, if he needed, to protect them from any wandering Vietcong troops.

That evening, they pulled into a quiet mangrove hideaway, tied up the boats, and started preparing a cold meal. They couldn't afford taking a risk with an open cooking fire. The border was too close, and they had heard about troop movements in the area from the villagers downstream. They had been cautioned and warned to be careful as they made their journey. Jonathan and *Quan* stood watch as the women prepared and ate their meals.

The young girl stood up from her place against a fallen mangrove. She picked up a bowl of rice with dried fish and walked over to Jonathan and *Quan* holding out the bowl for them to take. It was the first time that she had come up to them so closely without any hesitation.

Her head was bent slightly as she looked at the contents of the bowl. Slowly, she lifted her head to look at the men.

Jonathan stared at her in disbelief as she spoke to him in clear unaccented English. Her blue eyes were smiling at him from under her silky black hair. He had not noticed her eyes before. He had avoided looking at her closely, understanding that he shouldn't pry into her life after the ordeal she had encountered. He knew that when she was ready to talk to him she would. He wasn't prepared for the language when he heard her words.

"Mr. Jonathan, you must eat now and rest before we head up the river again. It's going to be a long night, and you must have all your strength," she said smiling, a dimple appearing on her right cheek which seemed to radiate the clear blue eyes even more. Jonathan started to say something but lost his words. He shook his head slowly, shaking the surprised expression from his face. She giggled at his expression and at his confusion.

Jonathan turned slowly towards *Quan* who stood with his mouth opened and asked, "*Quan*, did you know that this young lady spoke English? This lady who has traveled with us for the last four days."

"No, Jon, and I'm just as surprised as you are. She has worked with us and guided us these past few days, but as with the Vietnamese custom, she drops her eyes when speaking or when troubled. I didn't think anything about it. *Anh Phon* and I have only spoken Vietnamese, as you have, with her. There was no reason to suspect otherwise," he finished, turning to face the young girl. He smiled and walked over to her and stood next to her.

"What is your real name, our young friend? We know your Vietnamese name is *Tuyet*, but where did the blue eyes come from and your perfect English?"

Quan turned to face Jonathan, laughing as he said, "Her English is far more superior to yours, my friend, who likes to listen with his mouth open. What's your problem?"

Jonathan smiled at the young girl whose life he had saved a few days ago. It wasn't often that he could be taken by surprise, but this was a classic. He walked over and sat down on a log beside her. She

sat with him. She lowered her eyes and moved away from him, sitting closer to a mangrove for comfort and protection.

"You don't have to be afraid of me," he said softly reassuring her with his voice.

"I know that," she replied meekly. "If you had not arrived the other night when you did, we would have been killed. I know that you saved our lives, and for that I will always be grateful. We owe you our lives. I couldn't say anything until now, as I didn't have the courage. I was still afraid and unsure of myself."

Jon smiled, relaxing as he spoke. He wanted to know as much about her and the elderly Vietnamese as possible, but he wasn't prepared to push too hard for answers or an explanation. She began slowly telling her story, the story about her life as she knew it and understood it. Her courage returned in her voice, her confidence becoming stronger. The elderly couple joined them and they talked, forgetting the time as it slipped by. Each spoke in turn, telling their side of the journey. They were not in a hurry, and time in the Delta had little value to them.

Tuyet's English name was Ruth Gervais. Her father was French and her mother English. She had been born in *Dalat* in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Her guardians had named her *Tuyet*, which means snow in Vietnamese, as the name reminded them of the freshness of the child's complexion. The name stuck, and she grew up with it. She was rarely called by her name at birth.

She had lived in *Dalat* all her life until six months ago when she and her childhood guardians fled their home after a bombing raid by the Americans. Her parents had died when their home took a direct hit from a bomb. Her younger brother and sister also perished. Her guardians fled with her moments before the bomb shattered her world apart, and she was alone with nowhere to go. *Tuyet's* protectors decided to head south, where they originated, to find protection and safety. But it never happened, as the fighting in the South was worse. They moved from one village to another with their ward, always cautioning her to avoid looking at people with her blue eyes, and never speaking English or French.

"Alors, tu parle Francais aussi," Jonathan finally asked mesmerized by her story and by the tragedy that she and her guardians had lived through.

"Oui, je parle Francais comme l'Anglais mais je prefer la langue de mon pere," she said slowly overcoming the difficulties in talking about her life and the loss of her family.

"Do you have any family in Vietnam?" asked *Quan* in French.

"Non, monsieur. There is only the three of us left, and I have no way of returning to England or to France to find my parents' families. It will take a long time to save enough money when I'm older and if this war ever stops."

Jonathan stood and walked over to the smaller boat and pulled something from his pack. He returned to the chattering group five minutes later and handed *Tuyet* a piece of paper, saying gently.

"This is for you and your guardians to keep. It is instructions on how to find me if we're separated before we reach Laos. After we're in Laos, I'll make sure that the three of you head for Europe, and there you can find your family. It's all that I can offer at the moment, but don't lose that piece of paper."

"Why are you doing this, Monsieur Jonathan? We really don't know you, and you're offering to help us like this. There must be a reason," she asked, her eyes darting between her guardians and *Quan* who sat quietly beside *Anh Phon*.

"There is a reason Ruth, if I may call you Ruth. It began a long time ago, and I really do understand your reasons for wanting to find freedom. I've been where you are, and it takes courage to survive. Yes, I want to help you to escape this place. But I also need to help you to find that freedom, to find that family that you need and one that I never had. Someday you can tell me about finding that happiness," he said standing, looking around sadly at *Quan*, who knew him best, and walked away from her.

Jonathan Langston was a man full of pride. He had lived and reached this stage of life by miracles. He had survived as she had survived, and he had only been a year older than she was now. But he had fears about the future and about his past. And he had shared those

fears with no one. This thirteen-year-old girl, whose life he had saved, opened a door to those fears, and he needed to be alone to think. He needed to let the fears flow through him, to understand them and to let them go. It was the letting go process that was hard. It was always hard for him. Ruth had struck some nerves, innocently, of course, because she didn't know his past. Only *Quan* understood partially his background, his childhood, but not all of it. He never talked about that life. It was behind him, and it needed to stay there if they were to survive the trip.

The tall man walked up the stream to be alone, to think, and to find that comfort in nature without the human contact. He found comfort with nature at these times, as he had when he was a child. Humans only complicated life, and he had found it was better to keep life simple.

He walked for about 200 meters and sat beside the stream, listening to the nightlife. He picked up a small stick and drew designs in the dirt along the bank. The act of drawing cleared his mind, relieved the tension, and made things become clearer. This was his way of facing reality his reality, as it was, at the moment. The fears slowly started to recede, and he began to relax. He looked over the treetops as the moon started to climb into the sky, casting its glow on the water, weaving a spell that had always fascinated Jonathan since he was a child. He sat and watched, enjoying the solitude and forgetting the time.

Slowly he moved to stand, and froze as a hand was placed on his shoulder. It was a hand that understood him and wanted him to be free from his fears.

He turned slowly to see *Quan* standing there smiling with him, understanding him. Jonathan looked slightly to his left and saw Ruth staring at him with those questioning blue eyes. Those eyes that wanted to know the truth and who wanted to be a friend to this man who cared about people deeply, but who asked nothing in return for himself.

She walked over to him slowly, her dark clothing hanging loosely on her slim body. She reached over and put her arms around his neck, saying gently.

"You're a wonderful man, Jonathan Langston and a man who has suffered so much. You are still healing from those wounds of the past. And you are also searching for that freedom that you talked about earlier when you gave me that piece of paper. Will you find it, Jonathan?" she asked releasing her grip from his neck, stepping back, and smiling.

"I don't know if I'll ever find that gift of freedom, but I'm trying the best way I know how. It may never happen, but I am trying my best, and letting go of the memories of my past is the hardest part," he said softly leaning back against a small mangrove, looking at *Quan*.

"Sit with me, Ruth, and I'll tell you a bit of my life. It needs to be told. *Quan* knows some of it, but not all. You, my new friend, opened a few doors that I had nailed shut a long time ago, and I wanted them to stay shut. Perhaps it's time to pull the nails out and let a few of those demons out for some fresh air," he said smiling.

She walked over and sat beside him. *Quan* sat in front of them as Jonathan started talking about the six-year old boy running for the school bus those many years ago.

He spoke until the full moon was above their heads, casting its warm glow around them. The tone of his voice was calm and relaxed; he could talk with ease with these people. They were his friends. Jonathan felt the need to talk and to release the demons that haunted him. No one wanted to disturb his thoughts and waited patiently. He talked about meeting *Quan* and *Anh Phon* years earlier after he came to Vietnam and how their trust and friendship grew until they became inseparable. There was never a question nor doubt about their love and trust. They were his family and the only family that he had truly recognized and trusted. He spoke, and they listened until he stopped, and sat thinking in silence.

Finally, Jonathan stood up and looked at everyone, feeling the relief of sharing his life with them. He knew that there were parts left out of the story, but those parts were not important at the moment.

He turned to *Quan* saying, "We need to move and cross the border while it's still dark. We need to be as far into Cambodia as possible to escape any prying eyes before dawn."

He turned and reached for the little girl's hand who was looking at him with the blue eyes. The dimple appeared on her face as she smiled. Her trust in him and *Quan* was very real. They were her family now, and she needed to be close to them.

Jonathan pulled her to her feet saying gently, while looking at *Quan*, "Tuyet, this is your little family now, and you will be safe with us. There is no reason to fear us. We will reach Laos where you and your guardians will be sent to Paris. From there, you can decide whether you stay with your French family or go on to England and locate your mother's family. The choice will be yours. Whatever happens, we must always remain in touch as your Vietnamese family. *Quan* and *Anh Phon* will always be here for you. They will know how to locate me because I am the traveler. That's my destination, and my destiny must remain undisclosed, for now. Someday I'll be able to tell you about that side of my life and why it keeps me in Vietnam, in Laos, and in Asia."

They turned and headed back to the boats, Jonathan looking at the moon deciding the distance they needed to travel and quickly. He knew that they had wasted valuable time, but it had been the most precious time that he had spent with people close to him in his life. He had finally shared with other people his deep feelings about life and his past.

As they walked cautiously down the path, Jonathan listened to the night noise, to the sounds that were familiar to him. Ahead they could see *Anh Phon* and the older couple running for the boats. Jonathan motioned to *Quan* who had started running.

Tuyet grabbed Jonathan's hand and tugged saying urgently, "We must run Mr. Jonathan and leave this place. There are gunshots not far from here, and they coming closer quickly."

Jonathan cursed himself as he started the run, pulling *Tuyet* with him. *Quan* and *Anh Phon* had the engines running as they reached the bank, jumping into the boats and almost capsizing the smaller one.

Jon gave the thumbs up as they moved to the opposite shoreline, disappearing into the darkness of the mangroves.

As they fled, they heard the gunfire coming from the location where they had been minutes earlier; Jonathan wondered when they would finally be safe. His mind started turning over and planning the moves ahead. He failed to notice that *Tuyet* was looking at him, tears in her eyes as she watched him smile.

Then the bullets started bouncing in the mangroves as they fled down the channel, picking up speed, as the mortar shells started exploding around the small craft as they raced ahead for freedom. It was a race against time and the visibility of the troops on the far shoreline.

TWO

JONATHAN LANGSTON WALKED DOWN George Street wondering when his old life would improve. He looked at the crowd of people on the sidewalk, listened to their comments, to their speculations. He thought as he walked. Two more bankers out of the way, and they're now under the microscope. They had no reason to interfere with his client, but they decided that they knew best and saw a quick way of making big profits at the client's expense, and without the client's knowledge. But they had no idea who was behind the entire bank scheme. What they saw on paper was far removed from reality, their reality. The world they lived in and abused was built on greed, and they were the masters of accumulating wealth by deception and manipulation. But this time the bankers had moved against the wrong people.

He turned again and looked at the dispersing crowd. He had to meet some people quickly, and head to his temporary home in Manly. One day he would have a permanent home and maybe someone permanent in his life, but not now. There were too many things to do. He slowed as he reached Bridge Street, heading for Circular Quay where he would catch the next Hydrofoil for Manly. His meeting with the messengers would only take minutes. They had things to do, and they had a deadline. Another message needed to be delivered before the

newspapers closed for the final edition. The bankers would not be sleeping well that night and the market would be a bit upset the next morning with a disclosure of a massive scandal perpetrated by two of the largest banks in the country and by the guardians at the top of the heap.

It's too bad, he thought, as he looked ahead and saw the silver Mercedes double-parked. The traffic was light and cars moved around the car easily. He slowed as he noticed a police car pull up beside the Mercedes. A few words were exchanged between the occupants, and the police car drove away.

Jonathan opened the back door and closed it gently. The older man in the passenger's seat turned his head slightly and nodded. The driver looked straight ahead. He was not involved in the discussion.

"Take this first envelope quickly to the newsroom at the Financial Review. The second one goes to the Stock Exchange on Bond Street, but not until five o'clock, when the exchange is about to close. Go to the chairman's office on the 12th floor and give it to the receptionist. Tell her that the chairman is expecting it urgently. He'll be there at five as he has a meeting with a representative from our client."

Jonathan stopped talking to look around the car; a slight odor of cigarettes clung to the leather upholstery. He watched the people passing the car; none were interested in them and didn't care if they were double-parked. When Jonathan spoke again, it was with finality.

"Take these last two envelopes to the names listed at the two banks. You are to give them to the two gentlemen personally. You'll need to get past their security apparatus, but I'm sure you'll manage. They must receive them as soon after six o'clock as possible, so you decide who takes which envelope. If by chance they're not there in the office, deliver them to the Managing Director or the next in charge down the line. Tell whomever takes the delivery that the chairman must have it tonight urgently. Say nothing else, and don't give them a chance to ask questions," he ordered as he opened the door to step out onto the pavement.

He stopped as the man with oriental features and short chopped gray-hair spoke.

"Will you be there for the interrogation later tonight, Jon?"

"Yes, but not before you guys have been working on them for a few hours. By that time, we should have a reaction on the news. I'll phone you before I arrive," he said as he stepped out, closing the door behind him.

The car's engine purred into life, and sped down the street. Jonathan watched it until it turned the next corner heading for the first part of the plan. He started walking, smiling at the people who passed him. It was a habit that he had picked up in Asia many years ago, and it served its purpose now. He was relaxed and happy. He could see the end of this assignment in Sydney almost over, and then he was heading back to Asia to find some old friends.

"It's time to leave this place," he said aloud to no one in particular, but he caught the odd stare from people passing him on the sidewalk. They continued walking, and he couldn't be bothered with stopping. He had a ferry to catch, a meal to eat, and some rest before the all-night venture began. Why does it always have to be at night, he wondered, as he wandered onto the crowded platform with people milling around waiting for the next ferry in the late afternoon breeze.

The Manly Hydrofoil pulled slowly into its parking space; passengers began to disembark, rushing to their various destinations. Jon watched them with interest, wondering where the people came from, mostly tourists who were chatting in various languages that he recognized and understood. They lingered, getting their bearings and slowly following each other from the platform. Other passengers made their way onto the ferry to get a seat before the next person.

He turned and walked quickly to the older wooden-hulled ferry bound for Manly. He was in no hurry and preferred the breeze from the harbor while he stood on the open deck. As he walked closer to the craft, which was being boarded by passengers scrambling for seats, he stopped abruptly staring at a woman about ten feet away standing in the line to board. His breath stopped; his chest bounced as he stared at the woman to be sure that it was she. He wondered why she was in Sydney and if she was looking for him. She always had a

way to contact him wherever he was. It was their safety net, their way of knowing where she was, and if she was safe.

He hadn't seen *Tuyet* in the five years since her divorce from a mad Frenchman, a maniac who preferred beating his wife into obedience, and who ran around with any woman he could find, or who was accommodating. They remained in contact with each other by telephone as frequently as possible, but distance kept them apart. The last time he had spoken to her was three months ago, and she was returning to *Dalat* in the Central Highlands of Vietnam where she grew up as a child, until her world was blown apart.

Her husband was a madman. Jonathan had met him only once, but that was enough. *Tuyet's* husband spent six months in a hospital recovering from an unexpected accident created by her rescuer in Vietnam. She had filed for a divorce, and it was granted quickly through contacts of Jonathan Langston.

The man came from a respected family in the political and social circles of Paris, and his profession had been chosen for him. He was a well-known banker and one of the best foreign exchange operators in the country, but he was also a rogue, taking kickbacks from others operators in the world of high finance, washing money for the drug cartels. His parents had received a gift and a note when their son went to the hospital. The note attached to the first digit of the index finger said simply:

"Your son is to give Ruth a divorce immediately, and he is to stay away from her forever or you will receive his head in the same way as the attached digit."

No signature was necessary, and there was no police investigation. It was a subject that was swept under the carpet by the family, as the man drank himself into an early death after he was released from the

hospital. It took a year for Ruth to have absolute freedom from him, and no one mourned his self-inflicted demise.

Jonathan stared at the silky black hair flowing in the afternoon breeze. His eyes flowed over the satiny skin following the shape of her lovely body. The woman was beautifully dressed in a light blue silk dress that floated in the wind. She turned as if she felt the scrutiny of his eyes and looked at him with detachment.

Then she smiled and a dimple appeared on her right cheek. Jonathan started walking towards her, unsure if it was *Tuyet*.

He stopped in front of her and said apologetically as he looked into her hazel eyes, "I'm terribly sorry for staring at you."

"That's okay," she said softly, unconcerned with his apology..

"I, for a moment, thought you were an old and dear friend whom I haven't seen for many years. I hope that I haven't offended you by my rudeness?"

She smiled, showing her even white teeth; the dimple appearing in the same place on her smooth skin.

"Not at all. I was curious to see who you were looking at and if I knew you from somewhere. I suppose the pleasure and surprise was shared equally by both of us," she said, laughing softly putting Jonathan at ease.

In some ways, Jonathan felt relieved that he had mistaken the woman for *Tuyet*, as he realized how he missed her. He needed to talk with her soon and go find her now that his life was changing. He now had a life with permanency ahead and no longer chasing the world for his masters after the next deal. *Tuyet* would have been a complication for him now, a complication that neither one of them needed. He wondered how she was and where she was, but he knew that she was safe.

He came out of his reverie as the woman spoke in monotones. He looked at her, and smiled saying, "I'm sorry but I was distracted. Remembering someone else and wondering where she is."

"She must have been important to you to have such an impact."

Leaving It Behind

"Yes. Come let us board the ferry before it leaves without us. I assume you're going to Manly," he asked walking quickly as the attendants prepared to pull the gangplank.

Jonathan turned to the right heading towards his favorite spot on the bow, to feel the cool breeze floating overhead as the ferry made its way around the Opera House, then turning right into the main harbor. He felt the presence of the woman following him as he walked around a few passengers.

He stopped at the bow and looked out into the distance. He took a deep breath and watched the white Opera House slide past them, the bow of the ferry digging into the waves churned by passing boats. He was at home on the water and some day, he swore under his breath, he would live permanently near the water. To hear and feel the energy of the water and the wind always gave him stamina, the desire to be connected to nature.

She walked up behind him and spoke.

"What is your name, mystery man, and where do you live?"

Jonathan turned slowly to face her. He looked into her hazel eyes as she smiled with a sparkling row of teeth. He wanted to say something to her as he felt physically attracted to her, but he decided that this was the wrong time. There was too much work to do tonight, and he had only left the other woman early that morning. When he spoke, it was with finality. He didn't need any misunderstandings with the woman, and he didn't want to see her after they arrived in Manly.

"My name is unimportant. I'll be leaving Australia tomorrow, and I have no idea when I'll return. As far I'm concerned, we met by accident, and I mistook you for someone else. We talked and we're taking a ride on a boat together. I'm going to Manly to visit friends for a few hours and then back to Sydney to complete some work before my departure tomorrow. I'm sorry," he said looking around feeling a little embarrassed by his directness, "but I don't need any complications tonight."

He smiled at the woman whose face became serious. He wasn't sure if the expression was because of his directness or if it was something else. He turned to face the harbor as the ferry bounced through

the waves. He heard a voice beside him, and he turned to look at the woman as she spoke.

"I'm sorry that you feel that way about me. I'm not trying to pick you up. In fact, I'm not looking to pickup anyone. We met, and I reminded you of someone. You seemed to be an interesting man to talk with. That was my only motivation. At Manly, we'll say goodbye, but we can talk as we ride the waves together. There's no harm in that."

Jonathan smiled at her again, regretting his abruptness and hating the necessity of it, but that was life now; his life that was controlled by other events.

"No," he said and they talked about little things, about what work she did and where she grew up in Victoria. He said little about his life, as it would be too complicated. They watched the people around them and leaned against the railing feeling the cool breeze float over them.

The large ferry slowly pulled into the dock at Manly, desk hands unraveling ropes to tie her up as the captain positioned her against the wharf. Without saying anything, Jonathan turned slowly and looked at her and smiled wondering what would have happened if things had been different. Was it that she reminded him of someone else, or was it another one-night stand? He wasn't sure. He walked slowly to the center of the ferry as people crowded to make a fast exit. For some reason, he glanced to his left and reacted out of instinct.

He saw the woman's hand coming towards him, a sparkling plastic object in her hand. He twisted and with a quick underhand thrust, he hit her under her right wrist, knocking her hand in the air, the object flying sedately into the air. It turned several times in the air in slow motion, bouncing against a passenger's briefcase, the needlepoint breaking and falling to the deck. It happened in seconds. Jonathan's reactions caught the woman by surprise as she tried to step back. His right hand shot forward to find the nerve under her left ear, stunning her, making her immobile.

Jonathan's movements were mechanical. He reached down and picked up the object carefully, placing it cautiously in his pocket. He didn't know what was in the plastic syringe, but he needed to know

why the woman had selected him as a target. He turned towards her quickly, grabbing her by her underarm, pulling her forward between the other passengers. He guided her off the ferry, walking with her as she shook her head trying to regain coordination. He held her tightly, heading for the street and walking down the Corso towards his apartment and the safe house in the same building.

As they reached the building, Jonathan pulled his cell phone from his pocket, punched a number, and spoke quickly.

"Send a team quickly to the safe house in Manly. Someone has just tried to take me out, and I need to know why. Bring the lab guy with you."

He pushed the front door to the reception area and pulled her into the lobby. She started to struggle, regaining some of her senses as the doors to the elevator opened. Jonathan pushed her inside; the doors shut. Her eyes stared at him in fear not knowing where she was and not understanding the speed in which he reacted. The elevator stopped on the third floor and the doors opened. Jonathan motioned with his head for her to exit. She stepped out and turned to the right and stopped, turning quickly to head in the other direction when she saw the Barretta pointing at her head. She heard his voice and responded.

"Go to the door at the end of the hallway and open it. Go inside, and we'll wait for some people."

He followed her to the last door and followed her into the room, closing the door behind him. He motioned her to sit on the couch, as he removed the syringe full of clear liquid from his pocket and placing it on a saucer on the kitchen counter. He turned and stared at her.

"Why?" was the only question.

"I don't know. I was told by my boss to locate you at the wharf and inject that syringe into your body and run. To get out of the area was the expression he used. I'm afraid of him, and he has been blackmailing me for an indiscretion at an office party six months ago."

"How did you know how to find me?"

"He gave me a photo which was obviously taken a few years ago, and I was lucky. Actually, it was you who found me by mistaking me for someone else. I was ready to leave the wharf and go home to North Sydney. I really didn't want to be involved, and I'm not sure if I would have used the needle. It was close. Who in the hell are you, and why am I involved with this mess?" she hissed.

"There are some people coming here in a few minutes. You must answer all their questions. If what you say is true, you will have no problems, and you can go home or return to work. It's your decision. Just tell your boss that you didn't make contact," he said walking over to the center of the room looking down at her lovely face as she stared at him.

For some reason, he believed her, realizing that she was being used to get him. But he wondered why. He turned quickly asking two questions and stopped when he heard the answers. The equation came together; a door to his past was jerked opened, when he heard the answer to both questions.

"Who do you work for, and who is your boss?"

JONATHAN LANGSTON LEANED AGAINST THE KITCHEN COUNTER as she spoke the words that were hard for him to believe. He hadn't heard the name for years, believing that the man was dead, buried in the darkest recesses of Asia. Was it really the same man, he wondered, or was it just a coincidence? He didn't like coincidences, didn't believe in them, but he had heard her words clearly.

"How long has this man been living in this country?" he asked her trying to remain detached but wanting to learn as much as possible.

"I believe he has been here for about ten years since the banking industry de-regulated in 1985. I know that he has citizenship in this country. He travels a lot to Europe and Asia. Last week he returned from Vietnam and was a very upset man for some reason. Most of the officers stayed away from him after his first day back. Things got worse. This afternoon, he called me into his office and told me to find you at Circular Quay going to Manly. I had been waiting around the

Leaving It Behind

wharf for about two hours watching each departing boat, and getting nowhere. Why and for what reason, I don't know. He told me if I didn't do as he said, I would never work in another bank again, not that it really matters any more."

She stopped talking, watching for any reaction on Jonathan's face. She couldn't read anything into his expressions, but she sensed that he was considering options and quickly. He was about to say something when they heard a knock on the door, and it opened. Three men entered; the last one closed and locked the door. The action was not missed on the woman as she sat up quickly, massaging her injured neck.

They walked into the room, the older man nodding his head at Jonathan, asking, "What do we have, Jon?"

"I'm not sure, but so far I believe her story. Her boss was framing her, and if I'm not mistaken, I know him. Check out the stuff in that syringe that she tried to use on me," he said pointing to the large plastic tube in a dish on the counter.

One of the men walked over to the counter, picked up the tube, and squirted some of the liquid into the saucer. The odor floated across the room, the smell of freshly cut almonds circled their heads.

The older man looked at Jonathan, saying as he smiled, "I think you know that odor, don't you? There's no need to go further."

Turning to face the other man he continued, "Don't touch it. Someone has tried to give Jon a lethal dose of potassium cyanide".

Turning to face the woman, he said, "You'll need to come with us for your own protection."

"What do you want us to do now, Jon?" he asked turning to face the younger man who stood looking at the woman, making a decision to save her life.

"Keep her under wraps for awhile. Get all the information you can from her, but I think that she has been duped. Then pick up Rene Blanchard at Indosuez and bring him to where we're questioning the two other men. Keep him out of sight from the others, and don't let him know that I'm involved tonight. We know each other. I'm sure of

it," he said turning to face the woman who had tried to inject him with the deadly stuff.

He thought for a few moments and turned to face the men saying, "Find out as much as you can about him and what he has been doing over the past ten years. Find out why the clowns were in Vietnam last week. He's connected to the other two banks, in some way. We need to find out how he was warned and why he went after me. How did he know I was even in this country? We need answers and quickly before the next phase of our plan kicks into place."

Jon turned and walked to the door, stopping as he unlocked it. He turned to face the woman. "On the ferry, I said that I would not be seeing you again. I was wrong. We'll need to work together for awhile and you must trust me, and these men," he said, turning and walking out the door, closing it behind him before she could respond.

JON LANGSTON WALKED QUICKLY towards the elevator, punched the button, and continued down the hallway deciding to take the exit stairs. He opened the door and went up the stairs two steps at a time to the next level. He walked back down the hallway to the room exactly above the apartment on the floor below.

He opened the door and walked in, asking the man sitting near a console who turned and smiled, "Did you hear the conversation below?"

"Yes, and we now have a turn of events. Coincidences surprise me sometimes, but I think we're lucky this time. I've called the other people, and they're on their way to pick up Blanchard. How did you recognize him?"

"It's the name he used in Saigon twenty years ago when he wrote a letter to a Vietcong general trying to capture me. Blanchard knew about my closeness with *Quan* and suspected that I would reach him in the village and escape. The general was to capture me and failed, and Blanchard escaped to Laos. In those days, he was a double agent and was tied in heavily with the New York mob. We set another trap for him in Vientiane two months after my escape from the South, but the elusive scumbag disappeared. Most of us thought he was dead,

Leaving It Behind

until now. Why he took on that name is a mystery to me. His real name is Serge Bernier," he said walking over to listen to the conversation going on below.

Jonathan turned slowly to face the tall lean man with a military style haircut and said, smiling, "Bernier set up a trap in Vientiane to catch me by using *Tuyet* and her guardians," he said slowly not sure if he had told the general the entire story.

"I never told *Tuyet* or her guardians about the jerk," he said slowly remembering that night so long ago. "He was about to inflict the same degrading act on *Tuyet* as the Vietcong did in *Quan*'s village in Vietnam when I stopped it. The incident in Vietnam was totally unrelated to Blanchard or the Vietcong General. *Tuyet* and her guardians were simply caught by some rogue Vietcong soldiers on the loose, and I just happened to be there at that time and save them from death. In Vientiane, it was only luck that brought me back earlier to prevent the same thing from happening. I fired at him twice as he dove out the window into the river, and I thought that I had killed him, until now," he said with clenched teeth as he walked over to look out the window toward the moonlit beach in the distance.

Jon turned slowly and looked at the older man, who sat in silence, and listened not wanting to interrupt Langston as he continued speaking sadly, the memories of twenty years earlier still torturing him.

"That woman was directed to take me tonight, and if caught, she would take the fall, an innocent victim," the young man said shaking his head sadly. "Blanchard is using her for his own reasons. Somehow he's tied to the other banks, and we'll find out more tonight. We need to know how he's connected with Indosuez quickly. He's the boss, but I'm betting that his past activities are unknown to the bank. The other bankers would be controlling him. Can we get our European people to do a quick trace on both names and also within the banks? Have the cousins in America check him out and find the linkage between the organizations."

The old man stood up. He was tall, his back straight for a man in his mid-seventies. His posture had military written all over him even his being dressed in an expensive well-tailored suit. He rubbed his

hand over his head and smiled at the younger man. His eyes sparkled with excitement. His movements were agile for a man of his age.

"There's no doubt about you, Jon. Even in the old days, you were able to pick the flaws and start tracing the linkages between things that we in the military could never see. That's why you could create our group and move freely to conclusions. We need to see this thing to the end, stop the bankers, and crush the corruption going on at the top levels. They're trying to take over the power that belongs to the governments, not just ours but all governments. The global bank cartel is moving too quickly, and the manipulators are accumulating an enormous power base. With their ability to control the financial systems, they can control the governments. And they're using the drug cartels as their base for the financial manipulation by laundering their money worth billions. We need to stop them before it's too late."

The man turned to walk to the door, and stopped when he heard Jonathan speak.

"General, I've always respected you and have enjoyed working with you. You and only you gave me a chance. You believed in my abilities and me. To me, you're like a father and a man that I respect. But you must understand that after we break this thing up, I must quit. I've had enough and I need to find a new life for myself before it's too late, to be happy and to find some sort of permanency for the future," he reasoned watching the frown appear on the old man's face.

The general turned to face the younger man, the frown slowly receding as he spoke.

"I know, Jon. I've known it for some time but I have also, for my own selfish reasons, been putting that day off, hoping it wouldn't come. Once this is put to bed, you can walk away with your freedom and my blessing. We owe you more than you'll ever realize. It was your original plan. You saw something that we didn't see, and you put the group together better than we would ever have envisaged. You've made a fortune with us, but the money has no meaning to you, not until you find what you want."

The older man walked over to Jonathan and embraced him without shame. He felt the sadness in having to let the son he didn't have, go.

He looked at the young man, saying gently as he walked to the door, "Jon, we've always worked well together. You are like a son to me, but as a father, I must also release you to find your freedom. It is back in Asia. She's there waiting for you in *Nha Trang*. You must go and find her before it's too late. But we must stamp this global bank corruption out before you'll ever have that freedom, and you know it. I'll be in touch later," he reminded as he opened the door and walked out, leaving the younger man alone.

Jon stared at the door; the noise from the recorder on the table went silent. The meeting below was finished. The three men had left the apartment, taking their ward with them to talk at another location. She was okay, and they would protect her. He walked over and turned off the sound activator from below. They no longer had a need for it today. Tomorrow, things would be back to normal, whatever that meant, he wondered, as he walked out the door, closing it with finality.

Jonathan walked the short distance to the wharf thinking about what was ahead, about what the general had said. He felt relieved that his job would be over soon, and he could find that freedom. He found it interesting that the general was the only Westerner that he really trusted, and admired. The other few selected people that he trusted without question were in Asia, mostly in Vietnam.

The general's comment about finding her in *Nha Trang* surprised him. The old man had been keeping track of her all these years and had never said a word to him. He knew about their escape from the South together, and he knew about *Quan* and *Anh Phon*. But Jonathan had seldom spoken to him about *Tuyet* or Ruth by her English name. She was a true friend, and someone who knew him better than any other person. He had confided in her. He had told her his full life's story that he had told no one. And she understood him and trusted him. The general knew that they had remained in contact with each other, but nothing more.

Jonathan smiled as he walked onto the waiting ferry. The general, he thought, was a crafty old fox, who had been following his life in silence, and was pointing him in a direction that he must travel. He walked to his usual spot on the bow and watched the harbor lights in the distance as the boat started its course over the water. He smiled and thought about those days during their mad escape, feeling the concussion of the shells exploding around their small boats. Those terrifying moments when the mortar shells fell around them as they made their escape up the Mekong into Cambodia.

THREE

THE TWO SMALL BOATS FLED DOWN THE RIVER in the darkness, as the mortar shells exploded around them, searching them out, getting closer but not finding the targets. The artillery pieces on the far side of the river chased them up the river, using a random pattern of crisscrossing the river, searching and hoping to find the mark. As they fled, a thought kept coming to Jonathan. Why are the Vietcong wasting so much firepower on two insignificant boats? Or, was there a bigger, sinister reason? His mind kept going back to the rescue of *Quan* and *Anh Phon* on the waterfront. The note safely tucked away in his pack leapt into his memory, the signature of Rene Blanchard. The renegade drug dealer working on both sides of the fence, the front man for the crime bosses. A man that no one could trust, and now he had tried to eliminate him but failed.

A stratagem had been set, but Blanchard had his own spy network and slipped easily out of the trap. The man had escaped the net and fled to Laos. Jonathan knew where he was, and he was determined to find him and to destroy him. The traitor was his target. Why were they putting so much firepower on them, he wondered, as he searched the waters for obstacles from the lead boat.

Jonathan's head jerked around. He motioned urgently to *Quan* to slow down as he heard the terrifying noise like a runaway freight train crashing down the air corridors. Then silence was on them. They both

frantically reversed the engines trying to get out of the path of destruction before they were hit. They moved backwards, passing a small stream on their left when the explosion hit with its full force ten meters ahead. A direct hit.

A tree two feet in diameter lifted from the safety of the ground moved in slow motion into the river where moments ago they would have been in its direct path. Only luck had saved them. When the mortar had moved above them, Jonathan had grabbed *Tuyet* and pulled her closer to him, to protect her if he could if they were hit. She held on to his legs as they sped into the smaller stream, racing ahead. *Tuyet* screamed when the explosion hit, throwing her hands to her ears in terror, shaking her head trying to get rid of the blast. Jon placed his hand over her mouth and spoke softly, reassuring her that they would make it.

Anh Phon turned to him looking at the area map under a flashlight, saying. "Jon, this stream appears to be an escape route. It goes inland for about two kilometers and circles around to the larger stream, which returns to the Mekong inside Cambodia. With luck, we can make it," she said as she quickly closed the light and moved to the bow of the boat. She settled cautiously in the point, searching for hidden obstacles, occasionally pointing and giving directions.

Jon watched her and maneuvered as she directed. He would turn to make sure that *Quan* was following. He was smiling as they moved through the water. *Tuyet* gripped his leg and slowly started to relax from the nightmare, looking up at him, noticing the concentration on his face.

"Mr. Jon," she asked. "Are we going to make it out of here to safety?"

"I hope so, Sweetheart. We're doing our best to make it. *Anh Phon* is guiding us, and *Quan* is chasing our butts off. If I stop or slow up, he'll drive all over us," he said to her gently, jerking his head around listening as the next train came barreling down the air corridor a hundred meters to their right, and then silence again, moments before the explosion.

Jonathan turned to look at the other boat and gave *Quan* the thumbs up. He turned and put his hand on *Tuyet*'s head and said to reassure her.

"We're going to make it. Trust us. We want to live as much as you do. I'm going to find the clown in Laos that set us up, don't you worry, my young friend. And then we can all be free of being chased. We'll be free of this crap," he said angrily.

She watched his face closely and saw something that she needed. She saw a friend for life, a man full of courage, and a man who was kind and gentle. But she also saw the other side of the man. If crossed, he was a cold-blooded, calculating killer, and she was afraid for him.

She reached up and touched his face, watching the concentration lines disappear slowly. She saw him relax for one of those rare moments. Jon looked at her closely as she spoke over the noise of the small engines pounding the water, searching for more speed, for more pull.

"Jon, please don't ever lose track of me. I'll need to know where you are and to know that you're safe. You have something that I've never seen in a person. You love life, and you need to be part of that life. But you're also a little lost boy without family or roots. I want to be a part of your life forever, my dearest friend."

She smiled at Jon as he looked at her and smiled, a shy boyish smile of being caught showing his feelings. He didn't know how to show feelings, and he was afraid of them. She slowly turned her head and watched the waters ahead.

A few minutes later, she crept forward to be with *Anh Phon*, saying as she moved, "Four eyes are better than two."

Jonathan nodded his head, slowing slightly until she settled. He watched the two girls as they talked, using sign language as he steered. The shelling had stopped. Maybe they had given up, or they were moving ahead closer to the border. He remembered *Anh Phon*'s interpretation of the map and hoped that the map was accurate. They would come out before daylight well into Cambodia and safe from the Vietcong. He settled back, his back aching from staying in the

Leaving It Behind

same position for so long. He watched the cloud cover moving in swiftly and hoped for a miracle.

And then it happened, the heavens opened up in one big blast, and the rains poured. He slowed the lead boat to let the smaller boat move up to the side, the rain pounding them. They laughed feeling the relief. They hadn't noticed the darkening skies in their mad dash to live, but now they had a chance.

Quan eased the boat up to the side and smiled, wiping the torrential rain over his face, feeling the pleasure of the moisture.

"Hey, Jon, boy! We're going to make it!" he shouted across the water.

"I hope those scoundrels bog in the mud up to their miserable Vietcong butts," he laughed as he throttled the smaller boat ahead.

The older couple waved as they passed from their watch position in the bow. *Tuyet* blew a kiss across the water, as they watched the lightening float across the skies, and heard the thunder pounding the heavens near and around them. Jonathan changed positions to relieve the pressure on his back. He needed to stretch, but that could wait, he decided.

THE CELL PHONE RANG SOFTLY in Langston's jacket. He looked around to see who was near him, to make sure that he wasn't being watched. The small instrument bought him slowly out of his reverie of the past, the escape from the set up by a Frenchman that he was hoping to meet tonight. Was it the same man, he wondered, as he took his cell phone out of his pocket.

"Yes?"

He listened for a few minutes, and said with finality before putting the instrument of bad news back into pocket angrily, "Find him, and I don't care how you do it. Send instructions to your government's people to put a watch on all airports in this country, and do it tonight. All flights! The jackass must be caught. I'll be there in one hour. Will you be ready to start? And find that crook, if you can."

Jonathan looked to his left and felt the deep apprehension in his gut, the changing of the course that he had designed. How did

Blanchard know about him? He wondered as he stood on the ferry looking at the distant lights.

No one knew that he was in Australia except the people directly involved in the operation to stop the bankers. The entire mission was a secret, only known by the top people in the organizations involved on a need to know basis. Time was the crucial element, and they needed to learn who or what was behind the bankers' plan to control the financial power of most of the countries in Asia. Their deviousness and secrecy were known only by the few top bankers in four of the banks that they had been able to track in other countries, and two in this country that were being coerced to join the main syndicate. The name of the bank syndicate still alluded them, the leaders. To them, it was a puzzle.

They knew that the banks had put into motion a plan of deception and manipulation to destroy the financial strength of the Asian countries, which would create a monetary crisis bigger than the world had ever known. The banks would control the Asian central banks, control the governments, and dictate terms to the industrialized nations. The masterminds and backers of the ingenious strategy, using the banks, stood to make billions, and they were so far progressed in their plans that they could not allow anyone to interfere. The messages had been picked up by Jonathan's organization. "Kill anyone who interferes, control the governments."

Jonathan watched the city come closer, the lights becoming larger; bouncing around as the ferry churned its way in the water. The cloud overhead was growing darker, moving faster from the sea. The rains would come soon but not before he was away from the dock. He had to meet Rachel, the woman with a name now who had been programmed to kill him by the missing Frenchman.

He felt the sadness flow through his body. He wanted out, but he couldn't quit until they found the roots of the mystery organization with no name. They needed to find the powerbrokers of the stratagem to control governments and destroy them. Otherwise, no country would be free; no one would be free, he thought with despondency. The leaders of an organization, which was so well-organized and op-

erating through the legitimate world of high finance in total secrecy, had to be found and stopped. No one would be free until they found the controllers of the big banks behind the master plan to control the world's financial power.

Jonathan stood with the other passengers waiting as the large ferry maneuvered into its parking bay. The deckhands threw ropes, their shouts heard above the churning reverse of the heavy engines. The passengers milled and pushed their way towards the front, to be the first off the boat. We'll never be far from Asia, Jonathan thought as he smiled at the people closest to him. The Asians had a way with getting out of a tight corner first. They shoved their way to the front and didn't care about anyone who was too slow.

He realized that he missed being in Asia and particularly the country where he lived most of his young adult life. He grew up there and almost died there a few times. And his closest friends still lived there.

The country was beginning to open up to the rest of the world; foreigners were being allowed into the country to invest in government-selected industries. They're cunning people, he thought. Let the foreigners in with their money; offer them anything to form joint ventures, and then put up the restrictions and force them out with no money. The Vietnamese would be winners. After all, they had survived decades of war, beat up on the French and Americans, and they now deserve a few rewards. It's their country and they've earned it.

"I want to go back to Vietnam to my people," Jonathan said aloud to an invisible person beside him.

He was startled when a voice next to him asked, "Are you talking to me?"

"No, I'm just being stupid, and I talk to myself often. Sorry for bothering you," Jonathan said as they started walking off the gangplank together.

The man watched the tall man with the dark tan as he walked to the other end of the wharf speaking into his cell phone. As the man walked past Jonathan, he glanced at him talking on the small instrument, saw the man's serious expression, and realized that he was pre-occupied with the conversation.

The stranger moved on slowly, but stopped in the shadows where he could watch the tall man unnoticed. He smiled and reached into his pocket for his own cell phone, pushing a number.

He listened for a few seconds and said, "I have Langston in sight. I was lucky. I didn't see him until we arrived at the wharf. I'll follow if I can and see if he leads us to the bankers. We're certain that they have them."

The man dressed in casual clothes and light jacket smiled as Langston walked past him. Jon said as he disconnected, "Send me a backup quickly, and I'll stay in touch. We need to find those bankers, and quickly. They know too much and must be eliminated."

Jonathan walked out of the terminal building and hailed a passing taxi. The cab stopped, and Jon jumped in quickly slamming the door, giving the cabby instructions. As the cab moved away from the curb, Jonathan looked back and saw the same man that he had spoken to earlier run out to the street, looking frantically for a cab.

He leaned forward and told the cabby to change directions quickly, to turn up Pitt Street instead of going to George Street. The cab swerved into Pitt quickly forcing Jonathan to the other side of the car. Jon turned and saw the pursuing man jump into a waiting car as they rounded the corner.

He turned to the cabby, and threw a twenty dollar note on the seat, saying, "Hit the paddle quickly and turn left on Bridge Street but pull over beside the bank. Stop and turn off your lights."

"What happens then?" shouted the cabby as he quickly looked back at the passenger with money.

"I don't know. We'll wait for a few moments. I'll stand outside the cab. I want to see who's following me. Understood?"

"Yes," he replied as his foot hit the floor, and he sped up the street. The light was red, but the cabby was Asian, and rules were to be broken if you had a good fare, besides the client was in a rush. Breaking rules was an Asian pastime, and he was having fun.

He turned the corner; a horn blared, and he skidded to a stop next to the bank as Jonathan jumped out and stood next to the car.

Leaving It Behind

Jonathan smiled; the race was on, and adrenaline was pumping in his veins. Someone was interested in him. He had set up a trap for the man back at the wharf. The man had been too interested in him while he was on the cell phone. No one stared at someone from a dark corner, without a reason. The man stayed hidden until Jonathan walked past him.

A late model sedan fled up the street just making the green light. About fifty meters up Pitt Street, the car slowed, pulled over and stopped. The slender man in casual clothes got out and stood on the sidewalk looking in both directions for a few seconds, searching for something. He slowly started walking down the street, his hand under his jacket.

Jonathan smiled and got into the cab, "Time to have some fun," he said to the driver.

"Okay by me. What do you want to do?"

Jonathan told him. He laughed as he made a quick U-turn in front of two cars; the horns blaring as he turned left into Pitt Street, he raced up to the sedan and skidded to a stop. The casually dressed man reached the corner, looking down Bond Street in front of the Stock Exchange with a confused look on his face.

He turned quickly when he heard the cab's brakes and started running towards the sedan. The man in the sedan turned quickly to stare at the cab and reached into his pocket as Jonathan fired a silenced round from the Barretta into the back tire. The man shifted his body weight quickly with the movement of the car and raised a gun to fire at the cab.

Jonathan turned his gun slightly and fired into the man's right shoulder; the gun disappeared, and the man slumped over. Jon opened the cab's back door and got out slowly watching the other man running towards him, unaware that the driver was disabled. As he ran up to the car, he reached under his jacket and stopped. He saw a smiling man holding an ugly silencer at his head. When Langston spoke, he froze.

"Just move over here, and put your gun on top of the car. Then I want you to sit, like a good boy, on the sidewalk with your hands over

your head. Don't think about doing anything funny, because your friend in the car will get another round in his shoulder. Your choice, and I don't really care. I want a few answers, and I want them fast. Why were you following me is the first one."

The man walked up to the sedan cautiously and removed the gun from his jacket. He started to move quickly but stopped as Jonathan placed his gun on his forehead. The man stared at him and placed the gun on the sedan's roof.

"Now move over to the far edge of the sidewalk. Put your butt in the street with your feet on the sidewalk, and your hands locked behind your head. Then, your head is to touch your kneecaps until I tell you to move. Now, move it!" he shouted.

The man sat down and shifted his body until he sat like he was told. He looked at the man with the gun, but Jonathan had move to the driver's side of the sedan and was pulling the driver to the street. Cars drove by slowly but no one stopped; no one wanted to be involved.

The driver was in pain, mumbling that he needed a doctor but fainted when he saw the gun pointed at his face. So much for the bad guys, thought Jonathan. He turned and looked at the smiling cabby, who stood and watched. Jonathan pulled his cell phone and punched one number watching the two men.

He turned to face the cabby, and said to him in fluent Vietnamese, "How would like to stop driving cabs and come to work with me?"

He turned and spoke into the cell phone quickly, smiling at the expression on the cabby's face.

"Send two men to the corner of Pitt and Bond and pick up two pieces of garbage. Take them to where we're talking with the bankers. We need to know why they followed me, and why with guns."

He listened and said, "Yes, they're armed. The driver has a bullet wound in his shoulder and the car will have to be removed. Get the locals to pick it up and call the information to us tonight. Okay, I'll see you in one hour now. I'll go and meet this Rachel and hear her story. By the way, I've recruited a friend from Vietnam. He's going to be my front man on a few things. I'll tell you about it later," he finished, disconnecting and putting the small phone into his pocket.

Leaving It Behind

Langston turned and said to the man on the street, as the crook tried to shift his weight, "Don't try anything. Some men will pick you up in a few minutes and take you for a little discussion with me later. You will talk, and if you decide not to, you'll regret the day your mother gave birth to you. Now, put your head down a bit further jerk-face."

Turning to face the cabby, Jonathan asked, "Have you decided yet, my Vietnamese friend?"

The man smiled, and scratched his head. He looked at the thing in Jonathan's hand and at the two men.

"How do you know that I am Vietnamese before I decide?"

"I grew up in your country. It's my home even though I haven't been there in ten years. I'm heading in that direction in a few days. If I'm correct about what has happened tonight, I'll need help from someone I can trust. And you may be that someone. I need eyes and ears around me, and I'll need someone travelling with me," he smiled disarming the mesmerized cabby.

The short Asian was shaking his head in disbelief as the tall man continued to speak.

"I have things to do, and I'll tell what you need to know as we go. Now tell me when you came to this country and why? I don't really care about the politics of your escape from the South. What you did do in the South will be my only concern, and I'll know if you lie to me. So, we had better start trusting each other very quickly," he said as they both turned to see a dark sedan pull up and stop.

Two men got out and walked over to face the tall man talking with an Asian cabby. The older oriental looking man smiled at Jonathan and said, chuckling.

"You up to your old tricks again, Jon. You're recruiting again, and one of our people," he chuckled, as he turned and walked over to the man on the pavement and cuffed him. He helped him to his feet and pushed him harshly towards the car. The other man had the wounded man on his feet and was moving toward the car. Jonathan watched the men as they shut the doors.

The Oriental walked up to the cabby smiling, glancing over to watch the reaction of Jonathan as he spoke.

"It's been a long time, General *Thrang*. I should have shot you when I had a chance, and now I'm glad I didn't. I could have slept a lot easier for years, but as history has proven, you were right when you opposed them at the end of the war. By that time, I had escaped, and you, how did you escape, and when? We have a lot to catch up on, my old enemy, who may turn out to be a friend, if we play our cards right."

Jonathan watched the two men; the two Vietnamese who knew each other from the war days, and who obviously had been on opposing sides.

Thrang walked over to the Oriental and smiled, saying, "We had no idea, in those days, who was a friend or an enemy. Things were happening too quickly for us to understand. I made mistakes; we all made mistakes, and we paid the price for those errors. Now, what does my new foreigner friend, who speaks my language better than I do, want me to do? And what is your name, my old comrade?"

"My name is *Quan*, and this young foreigner is Jonathan Langston. We need to help him to prevent a crisis that is destroying Asia, and it will destroy our old country, if we don't stop it."

"Why should I help? My old country is the South, and the imbeciles of the North have destroyed it. Give me one good reason to help?" *Thrang* asked sadly.

Jonathan had been listening to the older men. He turned to face *Thrang* and said softly, "So you can go home and help rebuild it. The time is right and the country needs help from people like you, and like *Quan*. The banking system is in chaos, and its about to be destroyed by foreign bankers who want to take the financial strength of the country for their own benefit, for their greed, and to make massive profits which your people will never see. They, the foreigners, have launched a strategy that the government can't stop, and we must, if Vietnam wants to be free forever."

Jon watched the reaction on *Thrang's* face, saw the frown and the concern appear on his face.

He turned and walked to the car, saying to the two Vietnamese, "Let us go. The driver can drop me off to meet the woman, and I'll talk to the bankers later. *Thrang*, if you want to come with us, call your company and resign. If you decide otherwise, it was good to know you. Give *Quan* a contact point for me. I'm leaving for Vietnam soon, and I need both of you with me. It's your decision, and I hope you decide correctly for yourself and no one else."

THE CAR STOPPED AT THE HILTON HOTEL. Jonathan Langston got out and walked across the street and entered the Wesley Mission Building with a plastic card. The doors opened, and he walked to the elevator and punched the button. The elevator door opened. Two men stood and nodded their heads at Jonathan. He entered, and one of the men pushed the button to level ten. The car moved.

Jon looked at the men. "What level are they on?"

"The bankers are in the large room near the chapel. They've been prepped and screaming for help, demanding to talk to their superiors and attorneys. They're not sure where they are and who's holding them. They're terrified, at the moment," said the older man with a European accent.

"Good. Keep the pressure on and hold their passports. Don't give them a break. Did you find the Frenchman?"

"Yes. He's across the street in the bar with some friends. He's being watched, and if he makes a move, we'll nail him."

"Okay. I want you two to be prepared after I speak to the woman. Has she said what she wants?"

"Not yet. Only that she needs to tell you something about the frog," the German said with a loathing in his voice.

Jonathan laughed at the comment, looked at the man and smiled. He said as the doors opened, "You really don't like the French, do you?"

"Do you?" asked the German who had a habit of answering questions with a question, his blue eyes smiling.

They walked quickly to the end of the corridor and stopped in front of the last office. Jonathan turned the knob and walked in. The woman was sitting on the couch holding a glass of mucky liquid, the fumes floating across the room. He closed the door slowly, leaving the two men outside. He looked around the large office and walked over to her, looking down at her face. She was crying.

"What's the problem, and why did you want to see me so quickly?" he asked gently, not wanting to alarm her.

As she spoke between the drinks and sobs, Jonathan became angrier. At one point, he was ready to have Blanchard picked up immediately, but he held back.

Finally, he said gently to Rachel, "You'll be protected from this pig. I'll be leaving in a moment to visit your old friend. One of the guys outside will take you to a safe place until this thing is over. You'll be safe with us."

"When will I be safe?" she sniffled.

"Soon I hope. I will not be seeing you for awhile, and maybe never. I'm leaving the country tomorrow. This boss of yours is involved in something that must be stopped, and you have just given me a vital piece of information," he said turning and walking to the door.

He stopped when he heard her comment. He stared at her, astonished at her remark. She had just said the words, named the missing link. She mumbled, as she lay back on the couch, the name of the organization controlling the bankers.

Before she passed out from the booze, she said incoherently, "They will kill me for repeating that name."

TWO MEN WALKED QUICKLY INTO THE AMERICA'S CUP BAR in the main foyer of the Hilton Hotel. It was dimly lit, smoke hanging heavy in the air, and the noise from the patrons was loud. The decor of the bar was fitting of a yachting club with pictures of famous sailing yachts hanging on the walls, and plaques testifying to the victories of the America's Cup and the sailors winning the cup.

Jonathan and *Quan* walked over to the bar and stood, looking around. Their eyes took in the entire area, focusing on each group of patrons. In the far corner, Jonathan saw his man sitting with other men dressed in dark colored business suits. He felt the anger rise from his gut; he reached automatically under his jacket and stopped. He felt the urge to kill the man, but it was not the moment.

The blond-headed tall man in the corner was controlling the conversation, laughing and jabbing his forefinger at each person as he spoke.

Jon watched with interest at the arrogance of the man, and turned to *Quan* saying, "He hasn't changed that much, only much older and a little heavier in the waistline. The guy has done well for himself. Now here's what we need to do, and we need to find out who he's with, the names of each person at that table. It may mean nothing, but we can't take any chances."

Quan nodded his head and walked over to the head barman and spoke. He laughed at the comments being said by *Quan*. The barman turned and walked over to the group and spoke. They looked at him, and each man reached into his pocket and took out a business card, handing it to him. The barman placed the cards into his pocket. He thanked them and walked to the next table and did the same thing. The barman continued around the tables doing the same thing, asking the same question and getting a mixture of responses. Some people refused to hand a card; most handed the card without a problem. *Quan* watched from the sidelines and watched the group of five with Blanchard. The barman returned and handed *Quan* the first six cards and walked away fifty dollars richer for ten minutes of work.

The Oriental walked over to Jonathan sitting at a table near the entrance. He sat down and handed the cards to Langston who looked at them slowly, each in turn trying to remember connections with banks. Two men were lawyers; two others were bankers and one accountant, a partner in one of the largest accounting firms in the city.

He handed the cards back to *Quan*, asking, "How did you get the cards so easily, my friend?"

"Easy. The Australian weakness for gambling. The bar offered a raffle with first prize of a bottle of *Don Perignon*, 1975. The drawing is later tonight but there will be no winners," he said chuckling.

Jonathan laughed and told him to check on the people with the banker. He quickly wrote on a piece of paper a message and called the head barman over, giving him the note attached to another fifty-dollar note. The barman listened, smiled, and walked away.

Ten minutes later, a hotel bellboy came into the bar with a large sign and paging one of the patrons. The sign read, "Mr. Serge Bernier".

Jonathan watched as the bellboy called out the name several times walking around the room. Langston kept his eyes on the banker, who sat up straight and stopped talking as he heard the name. He froze, and his mouth dropped open as his friends continued talking. The name meant nothing to them.

Blanchard looked around the room, searching for something or someone. He lifted his cell phone, dialed a number, spoke for a few seconds, and put the phone down.

Jonathan sat back and waited to see if he had summoned someone. Is there a protector for the man close by, he wondered, as a tall casually dressed man walked into the bar, going straight over to the table. The man leaned over and spoke to Blanchard, turned, and headed towards the bellboy who was still circling the bar areas, calling out the name of Serge Bernier in a bad pronunciation.

The man spoke to the bellboy, took the piece of paper, and read it. He shrugged his shoulders and looked at the banker for an instance, walked to the bar, and ordered a drink. As he waited, he dialed a number. A cell phone rang in the circle of men, and Blanchard picked it up and listened. He said something and put the phone down and continued talking.

The man at the bar paid for his drink and walked over to a table in the corner and sat down facing the group. He watched and reached under his jacket.

Jonathan leaned over and spoke to *Quan* who nodded, stood up, and walked out the door. Five minutes later, he returned followed by

the European and a companion. The two men walked over to the casually dressed man's table and sat down, showing him something, and motioned for the man to stand. The European reached over quickly and took something from the man, removing it discreetly from his jacket. They stood together, following the man out the bar.

As they walked out, Blanchard's eyes followed the man, the protector; a deep frown appearing on his face. He turned his attention to the group around him, but he was no longer listening.

He started to stand when he saw the barman coming towards him with an envelope in his hand. The barman handed it to him and walked away, glancing at the two men sitting near the entrance.

The European and his colleague walked back into the bar and strolled casually up to the group in the corner, spoke a few minutes as the men watched Blanchard's anger boil. He stood and started walking towards the front entrance. As they passed the last table, Jonathan and *Quan* stood.

Blanchard stopped and stared at the tall man and the Oriental. He looked around the bar area searching for something or someone.

The Frenchman tried to say something, but the words didn't leave his mouth. The envelope dropped from his hand, unread. Fear rolled over his face as he stared at a man from the past. A man he had tried to kill a few times and thought was dead.

"Hello, Bernier," said the soft voice smiling at the tall man. "It's been a long time. Follow these men and no tricks. You have already tried to take me out tonight, but you failed. I want a few answers tonight, and you'll talk, if you want to live."

Blanchard stared at his enemy from the past, looking around slowly weighing his odds. He knew he was cornered, but he needed to escape this man. His life meant nothing now, and he would be killed if taken by them. His only chance was to make a break.

He slowly turned without saying a word. No words were needed. The tall European turned with him, and at the same time Blanchard shoved him against the table and knocking him against the others. He ran through the door and stopped when he felt cold steel on his neck,

hearing the metallic click sound through his ears racing into the inner recesses of the brain.

Blanchard froze and turned slowly looking at a smiling Langston, the enemy from Laos so long ago. The ugly muzzle of the silencer was on his forehead; there was no escape. He dropped his shoulders in resignation. He had lost that temporary chance to escape.

Langston looked at him and smiled, wanting the man to run, but realizing that they needed him for the moment.

"Move if you wish, Serge, and you're a dead man," he said with hatred in his voice.

"Come with us for a few answers, and you'll probably die anyway. You'll lose one way or the other. I have a score to settle with you. Shall we call it revenge? You came close to killing some close friends of mine in Vientiane and one that you'll regret. Do you remember the young Vietnamese girl? Do you remember *Tuyet*, the girl that you also almost killed in Laos and after you sent the Vietcong to kill me in the Delta. Do you remember these things?" Langston shouted angrily, feeling the urge to pull the trigger like so many times in the past.

This man was evil, a parasite who lived for the pleasure of destroying other people. He had no conscience. Jonathan stared at him, controlling his anger and feeling no emotions. He was prepared, and this man meant nothing to him. His only value was information, and he would give it, and then he would die.

When Langston spoke again, the Frenchman shifted his weight backward quickly in fear of the man.

"I swore that I would get you for what you tried to do to an innocent young girl. I've missed twice, but not this time," he threatened as he quickly snapped the barrel sideways clipping the Frenchman's right ear brutally. Blood erupted and poured down his neck and onto his white shirt. The patrons watched, as the man was led away, wondering who he was and who they were. But no one wanted to be involved.

"This business is serious," said a voice in the bar as the tall blond man was shoved out the door, bleeding.

FOUR

THE RAINS CONTINUED AS THEY SPED down the smaller streams, heading for Cambodia, and at times turning back deeper into Vietnam as the smaller stream wound its way slowly west. They searched for a village; fuel was low, and they needed food. Jonathan waved for them to pull over and find cover from the downpour. He had spotted the vague misty outline of a village ahead, smelled the early morning charcoal fires as the inhabitants woke for the new day. They were safe for the moment, but they needed to be cautious. It would be daylight soon, and they needed supplies before they crossed the border. Everyone was slapping the bugs and mosquitoes slamming into living flesh for the next meal. Each person cursed in silence, not wanting to show any signs of discomfort.

They pulled the two boats into a smaller clearing next to the riverbank and stopped. The men maneuvered the boats under the trees, to keep them well out of sight and to avoid danger as they were still well into enemy territory. Jonathan motioned for the women to go ashore while he and *Quan* waded into the water to conceal the craft from prying eyes on the other shore. He grabbed his pack with the remaining water and food, wading around the boat grabbing the M16 as an afterthought. *Quan* saw Jonathan's reaction and returned to his boat, giving a thumb's up as he slipped, grabbing the edge of the boat before his head was under water.

Leaving It Behind

Quan turned and looked at Jonathan who smiled pointing upward to the skies and whispered.

"Stay on your feet, old boy," he said chuckling as he waded to shore, throwing his pack in the middle of the clearing. He crawled up the bank and waited for *Quan*, pulling him up through the mud. They sat for a few minutes catching their breath and watching the opposite shoreline for any moments in the breaking dawn. Light was coming through the tall trees; the rain was slowing, the clouds overhead disbursing showing a bit of pale blue.

They stood and walked into the small clearing and sat with the others as they prepared the last of their meager cold meal. They sat in silence eating the tasteless morsels of food, looking at each other in silence.

Tuyet moved over and sat with her back against Jonathan, feeling the security of his presence. Jonathan removed his shoes and rolled his trousers to look at the slimy leeches on his legs. He took out his razor sharp knife and started the delicate work of scraping them off the living flesh, telling each of the small group of refugees to look for the devils. He then went to each person slowly and attacked the living bloodsuckers, removing them surgically.

Finally, he stood up and stretched and walked slowly towards the village, *Tuyet* and *Quan* following him closely.

"We need to find out if we're safe, and if we can find some food and gas," he said quietly, watching for movement ahead. They heard a dog barking ahead, picking up their scent.

They stopped as the young pup bounced towards them, his legs too long for his body, his eyes wide in curiosity.

"At least he's not destined for the dinner table like his northern cousins," *Quan* said chuckling as he knelt down and gave him a good rub behind his ears. The pup played and bounced around their legs, and headed off towards the village looking back occasionally to see if they were following.

The smell of charcoal burners floated from the houses, as they entered the village square cautiously. They looked around but no one

was visible. Jonathan walked cautiously to one of the larger houses and looked inside.

He spotted a vague movement from the corner as an old woman pushed herself to her feet slowly, steadyng her balance with a cane. She stared out towards the door, but the cataracts limited her vision as she squinted at the blurred images in front of her. Her skin was wrinkled with age and too many hours in the hot sun working in the rice paddies. She looked to be eighty years old, but her exact age would only be a guess. She slowly shuffled to the door, her back bent over from the years of hard labor, asking in a quivering voice, "Who is there?"

Her mouth was stained a reddish color; the result of years chewing betel nuts, the relaxant substance that the older villagers had chewed for years. Who needs drugs when they have the betel nut, Jonathan thought, as he walked over to the elderly woman.

"Don't be frightened, Elderly Sister," he said gently to her. "We don't mean any harm to you or to your family. We only need some food and gas for our small boats, which we'll pay for. Where are the rest of the villagers? We see no one here."

She smiled with an ancient grin, her red gums and the few teeth that were left, glowing at hearing a kind voice. She mumbled a few words, and reached over to touch *Tuyet's* face, running wrinkled hand through her hair.

"You're such a lovely young lady. Where do you come from, and why are you fleeing?"

"We are running from Saigon, and we need food and fuel for our boats to reach Cambodia, Elderly Mother," *Tuyet* said politely, keeping her eyes turned down in respect as she answered the old woman.

"You're so right for leaving this area. Enemy soldiers are all over the place. They come and steal our food, beat the men if they disobey, and rape our young women. The northern devils are everywhere, and the South has lost the desire to continue. I'm told that the leaders have fled the country, following the Americans who abandoned us two years ago. There is no hope for us," she said in resignation, continuing to speak looking around.

"There is some food here which you can have and a little fuel for your boats, but you must pay us something and leave quickly. The villagers will return shortly. They seek protection in the woods for the moment, the cowards. They left earlier this morning when we were warned that the Vietcong were down the river searching for our soldiers and some runaway dangerous people who oppose the war and the North."

She stopped speaking to get her breath, keeping her hand on *Tuyet's* head smoothing her hair. *Tuyet* held the old woman by the shoulder, asking her gently, "And what about you, Elderly Mother? Are you safe here until the village people return?" she asked leading her gently to a stool in the corner and sitting down with her.

"Yes, my young child. I'm safe. I am of no value to those evil men. I'm too old to worry about, and I have come to accept my destiny. I'm too worn to be of use to them or anyone. My children are all dead, and there's no reason to go on except to help these poor villagers here who showed me kindness and protection."

She quickly cocked her head to the side, hearing something that a normal person with sight would miss.

"Quickly," she mumbled. "You must take what food you need. The fuel is over in the cupboard. You must leave now. There are soldiers coming down the river in boats. I can hear them about a kilometer away, and they're moving quickly. Now, go quickly!" she urged with finality.

Jonathan reached into his pocket and took out money and placed the American dollars in her shaky hand, saying, "Thank you, Elderly Sister. I have placed more than enough American money in your hand to pay for what we take."

The old woman stared into space, sadness on her wrinkled face that was her chosen destiny. She reached up and touched the young man's face and reached over to *Tuyet*, saying, "Protect her, young man. She has a good life ahead of her, and you must always be there to keep her safe. That is your duty and your destiny. Now, go my young friends, before it's too late," she said turning to face the direction of the river.

Jonathan stood looking at her, concern written on his face, a decision going through his mind. He felt a tug on both arms. He looked at the women on each side of him, one he was now destined to safeguard and the other a very close friend who he would also defend. *Anh Phon* and *Tuyet* looked at him gently, understanding his struggle with saving the elderly woman. It was *Tuyet* who spoke first guiding him to a decision that was necessary for them all.

"My dear Jon," she said gently, "She has made a decision for all of us. She has accepted her fate. We must obey her wishes, so she can have peace in her next world. Come, my gentle guardian. We must go quickly while we still have a chance," she said looking into his eyes, feeling the warmth of his caring and believing in a man for the first time. He looked into her bright clear blue eyes, feeling something that he had not seen before, understanding her inner strength and caring, wondering what was ahead of them. The old woman had made a prophecy for them, but he didn't have time to think about it.

They gathered the food and fuel quickly and headed towards the door, stopping when they heard the old woman's weak voice, "Don't return to the river. They have found your boats and are destroying them. Head into the mangroves at the end of the village quickly. About three kilometers due west, take the large path into Cambodia. You'll be safe on that trail, but you must hurry."

"Thank you, Elderly Mother," Jonathan said, putting the small can of fuel down as the two women pulled him out the door. The others were running down the path facing west. They had heard the noise in the distance and were looking around deciding which direction to flee.

"Come," said Jonathan as they raced down another escape alley. They ran without looking back, the branches of the small trees slapping their faces as they moved along the small path, which they had almost missed. Jonathan took the lead, carrying the food in his pack, his M16 carried in front of him with the safety off, prepared to defend if necessary.

Quan stayed in the rear position, helping *Tuyet*'s guardians as they ran, stumbling occasionally. *Quan* helped them to their feet, guiding

them forward. They ran along the twisting path, avoiding the obstacles they saw, running into others.

Jonathan stopped suddenly. *Tuyet* and *Anh Phon* crashed into his back by his sudden movement. He turned and looked back in the direction of the village hearing the repeated gunfire, in short bursts.

"A small war has started back there," he said angrily under his breath feeling the helplessness. He started back down the path but stopped, when he felt the tug on his arm.

"No Jon," *Tuyet* said gently. "She has given us the chance to escape. Let us get moving now, or her life would have been for nothing to save us," she pleaded as she ran past Jonathan heading down the path with the others following her.

Jonathan stood for minutes listening to the gunshots as they continued in short bursts. He raised his fist defiantly in the direction of the village as a parting gesture as he turned and ran after the others. He cursed himself as he ran but realized that the old woman and *Tuyet* were right. There was nothing he could do. She had sacrificed her life to give them a chance to escape. She had given them something that few people would -- her life in return for their freedom.

As he ran to catch up with the others, his thoughts turned to *Tuyet*. A young lady who was much more mature than her age. She had been through so much, and her wisdom about life was far beyond those of most adults. Her acceptance of their reality at the moment moved him, making him aware of things he hadn't thought about before.

The old woman was right in so many respects. Their lives were interwoven. He was her guardian, but she was his teacher. It's all part of our destiny, he exclaimed under his breath as he caught up with the running group of desperate people heading deeper into the unknown forest ahead. It's funny, he thought. I haven't referred to her real name since we met. I only know her as *Tuyet* and not as Ruth. What's happening to me? I'm twice her age, and that child is teaching me a few facts of life that I've missed or haven't been exposed to.

They trotted deeper into the forest, at times unable to see the sky above through the heavy canopy. The trail was visible, but they needed to be watchful. *Quan* was in the lead, followed by the older

guardians who kept up with his pace, never complaining; realizing that they all had one purpose and that was to escape the dangers behind them. The larger path that the old lady had spoken about was somewhere ahead. They were close.

Quan stopped quickly and motioned everyone into the heavy brush. He dove in, breaking a path as the others followed. He moved quickly up the small incline about twenty meters away weaving his way through the borders jutting from the hillside. Jonathan followed up the rear, pulling his pack from his back as he ran, and slinging his M16 on his shoulder by the strap.

The branches of the scrub slashed their faces, pulled at their skin as they ran. They slipped on the wet undergrowth, regaining their footing as they rushed away from the dangers behind them. They reached an outcropping of borders and slid behind them for safety. Each person was breathing deeply from the uphill run.

Jonathan slid down next to *Quan* panting, taking off his pack, and placing the M16 carefully on the ground next to him. He looked around and motioned to everyone to remain quiet. He reached into his pack and heard *Tuyet* gasp when he withdrew the ugly instrument of death with the silencer attached. He looked at her and saw the concern and the fear in her eyes.

He looked into her eyes and reached over to touch her, but she shook her head, saying with a firm tone in her voice, "You must be careful. We're depending on you and *Quan*."

He nodded his head and turned. *Quan* stood and slid silently down the trail after him. They needed to be sure that the noise was not from soldiers, but *Quan* was convinced that it was. They slid through the slippery undergrowth, trying to remain as silent as possible. They rounded a bend in the small trail and stopped.

Voices were coming around the bend on the larger trail. Three soldiers were laughing at a joke being told by an older man in front of the column. The older leader stopped abruptly as they crossed the path. He leaned down, looking in all directions for signs. The marks were fresh. He raised six fingers in rapid succession indicating the

number of people who had taken the path. The soldiers lifted their weapons, heading off the main trail in pursuit of the small party.

Jonathan and *Quan* watched as the four soldiers moved slowly up the path, looking at the signs of running feet, stopping occasionally to look around with caution, looking for signs and listening for noise.

Jonathan sat with his back against a border, feeling the solid comfort of support. He watched *Quan* staring at the men below. What is he thinking, he wondered as he raised the silenced automatic slowly. His stomach churned, feeling the dread of pulling the trigger again, wishing there was another way to avoid senseless death. He was tired of killing, weary of the futility of it all, but he needed to protect the others. They had to escape. He aimed. His right hand firmly under the grip, adding more support as he gently took up the slack in the trigger.

The soldiers walked past their concealed position. Jonathan waited as they passed. The easiest way he thought was to shoot rapidly starting with the last person moving quickly up to the first, without giving them a chance. No noise to warn them, just the little pip as the projectile left the muzzle. He could feel *Quan's* gaze on him, wondering why he hadn't pulled the trigger on the last man.

Jonathan hesitated; the timing wasn't right as the men moved slowly past them, starting up the steep incline. They stopped, and spun around in unison and started running down the hill, slipping on the wet ground as they ran.

Jonathan released the pressure on the trigger at the last possible moment, as he was about to squeeze. He lifted the gun glancing at *Quan*, who was smiling, as they heard the charge of six full-grown wild boars, crashing through the bush charging the fleeing men. The boars charged, snorting as they chased the soldiers who yelled at each other. The last man going up the hill was the slowest to turn as his comrades passed him, yelling for him to run. His chubby legs held him back, the moist leaves adding another hindrance for speed. He tripped as the lead boar caught up with him; the boar's long tusk ripping into his backpack as he charged over him tripping as they both rolled down the slope gathering speed until they reached the bottom.

The chubby soldier jumped to his feet in terror before the boar regained his footing. The boar shook his head rapidly trying to shake the backpack from his tusk. He snorted and turned in circles, becoming enraged as he twisted his body. The man ran after his colleagues, glancing back quickly to see that the boar had tossed the pack with one violent swing off his head.

The boar turned around defiantly, searching for the target of his rage. His eyes cleared, and he spotted his victim and charged, bellowing his anger at the fleeing foot soldier.

The other boars charged past the terrified man seeking revenge on the other fleeing men. The lone soldier jumped and grabbed a low branch as the enraged boar threw his head upward for the final infliction, catching the man's trouser in the swing and stuck. The soldier pulled with all his strength trying desperately to dislodge the mad animal.

The boar shook his head violently trying to dislodge himself, his hind legs hardly touching the ground. They tugged and pulled until the soldier's trousers lost the battle and ripped, the boar falling heavily to the ground and rolling. He jumped up ready to charge again, but the terrified man was at the top of the tree staring down at the enraged beast. The boar charged the small tree, hitting it with his full weight, trying to shake the man out.

The soldier stared down; his eyes flashed terror, clinging to the small tree trunk, as it started to move forward with his weight. He stopped moving and held on as the animal bellowed his anger. He yelled at the boar, shaking his fist at the beast.

The boar stared, abruptly turned and charged after his mates who were still chasing the foot soldiers as they reached the main dirt road.

Jonathan and *Quan* watched, amused with the situation. Jon felt the relief flow through him at not having to kill the men. The boars were doing a good job, and these guys would not be returning.

"By the time they stop running, they'll end up in Saigon," Jonathan whispered to *Quan*.

The chubby tree climber cautiously skimmed down from the tree, retrieving his backpack as he raced after his companions. He reached

the main dirt road and stopped; yelled and jumped back and fled towards the river. For the first time, Jonathan noticed one of the soldiers, the older leader, sitting in the middle of the road slashing out with his machete in fury. The short man with most of his trousers missing had disappeared down the path; the older man abandoned.

Quan looked at Jonathan, and they shrugged their shoulders and waited. The leader sat in the road and didn't move. They waited for hours, it seemed, but after about five minutes, the old man laid down on the road.

Jonathan grabbed *Quan* by the shoulders, saying quickly. "We've got problems getting out of here. Let us get the others quickly and leave before those guys return to help their comrade."

Walking quickly up the hill to find the others, *Quan* kept looking back at the road, confused. The old man was still lying in the middle of the dirt path. And they had to walk past him.

The group followed Jonathan slowly down the hill; his automatic raised, ready to fire. When they reached the road, they saw the leader prone in the dirt, lying next to a decapitated two-meter Cobra. They were both dead and both defiant in death. The body of the snake was still twisting its last death movements. As they walked past the man, Jon pointed at the two fang marks on the man's face. *Quan* nodded his head.

Tuyet froze in her tracks as she stared at the man and the deadly serpent next to him.

She asked, not sure what had happened to the man, "Why is he lying there? Why didn't he run like the others?"

"He tripped in the wrong place," Jonathan said rapidly looking around, looking for any movement in the vegetation.

"Let's get out of here before this creature's playmate shows up. I hate snakes, and they don't ask questions. They just strike at anything that disturbs them."

They started running, *Quan*, pulling up the rear, helping the guardians as the group made distance between them and the soldiers.

Two kilometers down the trail, they stopped in a small clearing, moving out of sight of the road. They needed to rest and the narrow

escape had sapped their energy. They sat together. Jonathan parceled out the meager food, and each ate in silence. Finally, *Tuyet* spoke first.

"Why didn't the old man try to escape?" she asked stunned, her voice quivering.

"It was too late. He must have tripped in the path of the snake and was bitten. It was too late for him to do anything but to kill it, to protect the others. He made a decision and sat down waiting for death. It was all he could do," Jonathan said in between bites of rice cakes.

"Are there many poisonous snakes in this area like that one?" *Tuyet* asked, her voice shaky as she spoke, looking around her to make sure nothing moved in the undergrowth.

Quan spoke first watching Jonathan who ate silently, his mind focused a long way from where they were.

"*Tuyet*, our young friend, there are about thirty four species of snakes in this region, and thirty two of the reptiles are killers."

"How can you tell the difference then?" Her lower lip quivered as she looked around for the creatures lurking in her mind.

"We use one simple rule when we see a snake and particularly the large ones. We kill them. Kill them all is the rule of thumb. Isn't that right, Jon?" he asked looking over at his young friend, who was watching the reaction on *Tuyet's* face, as *Quan* continued to describe the snakes. She was visibly shaken about the near-miss and amazed that the others had not tried to save the man. She mumbled between words and tried to listen as the others spoke. Finally, she looked at the younger man as he spoke.

"*Tuyet*, he had no choice, and he knew it. He had been bitten in the face, and he was a dead man with or without the help of the others. They were too concerned about escaping the boars to stick around. They all knew the circumstances and quite frankly, I would have done the same thing," he said in resignation.

She watched the young man as he spoke and gently placed her hand on his arm. When she spoke, there was a meaning in her voice that Jonathan had difficulty with. She was older than her years, and she cared deeply for him and for them.

Leaving It Behind

"You must never give up, my guardian. The old lady was right about us. Our destiny is together, and someday it will be so. You have value to yourself and to us, and you must never lie down willingly and die. What a waste if you did that," she said looking into his eyes with compassion.

There was something there between them, but Jonathan avoided looking too far ahead. She was saying something about the future, their future, but he was missing the point. Or he didn't want to let her come too close to him. He was putting up a barrier. A wall that he was comfortable living behind.

"*Tuyet*," he said slowly choosing his words carefully, not trusting himself. "The old lady did say that, but it was the babbling of an old mind that had given up hope. I'm twice your age, and you're only a kid. I will protect you and the others," he said slowly unsure of where the conversation was going. "But I can only live my life today, and it doesn't work for me to look at the future. I don't know what's out there. Things happen for a reason, and they happen when we least expect them. I heard what the old woman said. But my destiny is only tied to protecting you, as well as the others until we get out of this crap," he shouted abruptly slamming his hand down on his knee in frustration.

Jonathan stood up quickly and walked to the edge of the clearing. He turned to say something but decided differently. He put his hands into his pockets and turned walking down the path into the scrub. He always wanted to be alone when an emotional issue confronted him. He needed time to be alone. That was his protection.

Anh Phon reached over and put her arm around *Tuyet*'s shoulders, saying gently, understanding the man, "He's a frightened little boy when it comes to emotions, *Tuyet*. He's running away from the truth and from his feelings. Give it time *Tuyet*. He'll grow up in his own time. Don't force him to grow up too soon."

Anh Phon glanced over at the path that Jonathan had taken and turned to look at the young girl.

"*Tuyet*, Jonathan likes being in control of his life. The old woman back there has thrown something at him. Her prognosis of his destiny

is a bit difficult for him to handle at this time. *Quan* and I know the man. He'll moan and groan for a while, but he'll come around to seeing the fuller picture. It just takes a little more time for him, simply because he missed the guidance that you and I had in our childhood," she soothed, reaching up to brush the young girl's hair gently.

"I know *Anh Phon*, and thanks," she said sadly. "He'll not always be twice my age. He's twenty-six, and I'm thirteen, but time marches on. There will always be thirteen years difference but not twice the difference. We have time. And we both have a lot to learn. Besides we need his help to get out of this mess. Come, my friend. Let's go find him and start moving north."

THE NEXT THREE WEEKS PASSED quickly for them as they made their way north through Cambodia. They were reasonably safe, but they were always cautious as they followed the trails on foot, asking for directions at the small villages. Sometimes the people were friendly, and at other times, they were met with hostility. The locals didn't trust strangers, and this small motley group was foreign to them.

Jonathan led the way most of the time, carrying the supplies in his pack, the automatic slung on his shoulder. He knew the trails and most of the villages they passed. At some, he would go ahead alone and meet with people he knew, making sure that they had safe passage. He was their protector and their guide. *Quan* always maintained vigilance on the small group, and when Jonathan was in the villages negotiating, he took over and protected the group.

There were only a few times that they needed to hide, but it was only a precaution. They were safe inside the Cambodian territory, but there were nagging thoughts in Jonathan's mind. They haunted him and chased the recesses of his mind. Who had betrayed him, and where was Bernier? The elusive Frenchman was behind each of the traps, but there was someone else who was pulling Bernier's strings. Who was it? He kept asking as they trudged on through the jungle, passing villages and stopping for food when they needed it.

They had another week to go before they reached the safety of Vientiane. There was still a war going on in Laos, but it wasn't directed at them, and they could be safe. Jonathan was making plans, as they walked, to arrange passage to Europe for *Tuyet* and her guardians. He needed to make contact with some trusted friends in the government. Then they could talk to the foreign embassies.

That night they sat in a grove under the protective trees and talked, the women commanding the conversation, the men sitting in silence listening. Jonathan and *Quan* sat together wondering where the words came from as the women babbled. Tien, the older man and guardian, offered comments. But his dominating wife immediately shut him up. He sat and listened, occasionally smiling at the ramblings of the three girls.

"Let them talk their nonsense," he said to the other two men who nodded their heads in agreement. *Tuyet* tried to dominate the conversation at times, but was hushed up by her protector, claiming that her ramblings were those of a child.

They felt reasonably safe now and cooked on open fires. They fished from the river and gathered edible plants from the forest. At one point, Jonathan had shot a small deer. They had cleaned and cooked it carefully, eating what they needed and saved some of the best morsels to carry with them. No one argued about the discomfort. Each one realizing that they needed to work together to survive the trip north.

The old lady of the group turned suddenly and spoke to the men. Her comments were directed to no one in particular, but she was demanding an answer. The men looked at her, the husband thinking about how to respond.

He mumbled a few words, which she dismissed with a wave of her hand, stating emphatically, "You don't know what you're mumbling about. Let the younger, more educated men answer," she said smiling through her missing teeth, showing the pleasure of domination. *Tuyet* jumped to his defense.

"Stop this bickering and stop picking on Tien, Elderly Mother. He's more knowledgeable than those young clowns who sit on their

hands saying zilch. Now, leave him alone," she said, as she stood up and walked over to Tien, placing a protective hand on his shoulder.

"Elderly Father, you should divorce that old woman that dominates you, but says very little of importance. You should find a younger more intelligent woman to share your intelligence with," she goaded, turning to face the older woman, who stood up quickly ready to challenge.

"Enough," said Tien angrily. "*Tuyet's* right. But if I choose a younger more intelligent woman, who would I be able to teach? No, I think I'll stay with the rambling fool who has been with me for forty years. I'm too old to change now, besides I couldn't handle the vitality of a younger woman. I could only stare and wish for younger days. No, I'm safe with her, my dear *Tuyet*," he said laughing from his gut, the infection growing as the others joined him.

The old woman turned and walked to the other side of the grove in disgust, stopped for a moment, started laughing, and turned to her husband.

"You aren't what you used to be, but I'm not complaining. I can rest these days, my dear, wise husband, who listens too much. *Tuyet's* right. I'll stop picking on you and flirt with the younger men," she said laughing and walked over to sit next to *Quan*, who shifted positions with Jonathan quickly.

THE GROUP TALKED AND RELAXED. The torments of the escape were behind them, but the dangers were still ahead, and they knew it. There was still an isolated war going in Laos; the communists fed by the hated Vietcong were on the rampage. The battles were in the provinces and pretty much isolated from Vientiane.

The American air bombardments had stopped at the end of 1973 at the time the Americans pulled out of Vietnam. Laos was used as the dumping grounds of bombs from the overloaded B52s coming from the bombing missions over North Vietnam and returning to the military airbase at Udorn Thailand on the Laotian border not far from Vientiane. There were still CIA financed operations still functioning in the northern and eastern provinces of the country.

Everyone sat forward to listen to the stories. Some of them, they knew something about. But Jonathan was talking about things that had been kept secret by the Americans. It was never public knowledge.

"What's going to happen to our country, Jonathan?" asked Tien as he moved closer to his wife, placing his arm around her shoulders. Jonathan smiled at the two elderly people. Tien's gesture with his wife was unusual, as affection was not often shown in the open.

Jonathan sat for a long time thinking about the question, wondering how much he could tell about his involvement in the country's future. But he trusted these people, and they believed in him. That was precious to him. Only a few people that he could remember had put so much faith in him in his short life. Only the general had seen something that he couldn't see and had guided him to where he was now. They had mapped out their future together, in trust. They had charted their lives together.

When he finally spoke, his words came out slowly and clearly. He spoke with understanding and a conviction for the future. They had decided earlier to take a break for the day and rest. It was time for him to talk, to unload his feelings on these people. They trusted him, and they were his only family.

"The South lost the war to the communists in the North," he said slowly. "The Americans abandoned the South two years ago bowing to political pressures, or so they say, but there were many more reasons than that."

He went on to explain the situation as he saw it and his involvement as far as it was necessary.

"The political leaders in the South gave up hope. They took what they could and fled. The communists had infiltrated every major government office and had infiltrated the key positions in the military. The soldiers had been shifting sides for a few years or just disappearing back to their villages. The Army of the Republic of Vietnam in the South called ARVN, for short, had given up hope long before the Americans pulled out. The evacuation at the end of April when we fled was the last of the American technicians, advisers and diplomats.

They decided at the last moment to fly out any Vietnamese they could, but they were being very selective on whom they took with them. It was chaotic in those final days before the American Ambassador was lifted off the rooftop by helicopter."

Jonathan paused momentarily to think and watch the reactions of the small group. Each person had shifted closer, absorbed with what they heard. They were hearing things which had never been said in public, about the corruption in the highest government circles, the deception by the Americans, and their manipulation in the corruption rackets.

"A few Americans in the military and diplomats were making millions by selling government materials and having an open line to drug trafficking. Some of the top echelon of the military and a part of the CIA had devised a system for the drugs, a long-term strategy. Plans developed over years of war to keep the drugs going into America for years to feed the habits of young people, and for those who had picked up the habit during the war. The top brass wanted to keep the scheme going; the millions earned from the source of supply was worth the risks, the secrecy absolute."

"The Golden Triangle was the source; the American military planes the conduit to America and to the rest of the world. The large U.S. military airbase at Udorn, Thailand was the prime staging area. The war was an excuse to finance the needs of the chosen few in the scam. And the American politicians in their desire to stop the spread of communism didn't see the other side. They didn't see it coming until it was too late. The racket was so well organized, so well controlled, that it corrupted the highest politicians in both countries."

"General Alexander Sloan hated the corrupters for what they were, for what they were doing to the young people. They had tried to get him to join in the scam, but he refused for ethical and compassionate reasons. And he had other reasons. But his real reason was that he wanted to destroy them, to expose them if he could find a way. The agency men hated him but feared him. He knew their secrets, knew who they were, and resisted them at every turn."

"But the general couldn't get the ear of the Washington diplomats. They were afraid for their careers if the truth about the war had been disclosed to the public. Their political lives, and their lives, were at risk. They had been threatened with exposure by the clandestine drug cartel made up of some top military brass and the agency power brokers."

"They operated in secrecy. Selected politicians had been paid well from profits made from the drug operations. All they had to do was to keep their mouths shut. And they did, and they refused to talk to a General Sloan from Saigon. They considered him a threat. They tried to retire him from active military service, but he was being protected."

Jonathan went on to explain that the agency bandits had set up a trap to kill the general in Saigon several years before the Americans pulled out in 1973, but he spoiled it.

"I was working for a company as an adviser for the American government on the long-range plans for supplying the government if the communists lost the conflict with the South," Jonathan explained. "I worked for a large multinational conglomerate that stood a chance to make millions by keeping the conflict going. Washington paid it, but behind the scenes it worked for the agency rogues. The company became the civilian funnel for the drug cartel controlled by the rogue CIA agents, thus, removing the agency's direct involvement. The military organized the transport and distribution systems. The agency controlled the supply sources coming through the airbase at Udorn from the Golden Triangle suppliers."

"I was shocked when I learned of the deception. I started looking for ways to spoil their operations without being caught. I had lost one brother to drugs in Saigon. And I swore that I would stop drug pushers, if I found them."

"But this thing with the agency and military was big and too well organized for me to stop alone. I needed help, but I didn't know to whom I could turn. One night, I overheard a conversation at the company's civilian headquarters. A chance discussion as I walked down

the hallway, and I overheard an agency man order the death of a General Sloan for interfering with their operations.

"I stood quietly in the shadows absorbing everything I heard, and waited for them to leave, so I could have an identity. I knew the plan, but I needed the identity before I reacted. I needed to save this general who I only knew by name. I wanted to make an example of the crooks. I knew that my job in Vietnam would be over as soon as I exposed them, but by that time I didn't care."

Jonathan Langston wanted revenge for his brother's death by an overdose supplied by these people. A brother that he hardly knew. He had left home too early for reasons that his brother never understood, and he could never talk about them. He had carried that guilt with him. Now it was time to repay his brother.

He waited and watched from the shadows. The plan was agreed for the next night as the general left his home to go to an official function. The hit would be made outside the general's home by the two men talking and with two accomplices backing them up. All neat and tidy and no complications from anyone, except from the man who waited in the shadows. As the two men walked out the door, they turned slightly and walked down the hallway to the stairs leading to the street, unaware of the man watching them.

Jonathan smiled as he waited. He knew both men; one was his boss, the top man for the company in the country. So he was tied into the conspiracy of the dope runners. He knew that he needed to move with caution and somehow warn this general who was to be taken out. But how was he going to be able to contact a protected general who was going to be eliminated? He wondered as he walked out the back exit.

The young civilian walked slowly to the center of Saigon to have dinner in a small café he knew well. He knew the owner and spoke their language. He often spent the weekends with their daughter and spent most evenings with the family. They had plans for him. They followed closely the customs of Vietnamese families, and Jonathan didn't argue. He was happy with the relationship, and he enjoyed being with a stable family for the first time in his life. But tonight he

needed to explain something to them, tell them that he may need to leave quickly after the next day if things went the wrong way. He owed them that, and he wanted to honest with them.

He talked for hours with Lan's parents. They listened to his plans but they didn't try to stop him. They understood his reasons and accepted his decision. Lan argued with him about the dangers, but agreed reluctantly to stay silent. Her father offered protection and support, but Jonathan refused saying that it wasn't necessary. The plan was set. They said good night. Jonathan returned home using the back streets without noticing that he had been followed to the café earlier.

Thirty minutes later, the café was blown up. The parents and their daughter burned beyond recognition. It wasn't until later the next morning that he heard about the bombing from a friend. He was never to find out who torched the place nor why. When he heard the news, he went to the police and was told that it was a local vendetta from the locals because the family was too close to a foreigner. The story told by the police was a lie, a cover-up.

THE SMALL GROUP STOPPED to eat lunch, letting Jonathan walk into the forest to be alone for awhile. When he returned, he smiled at them, asking, "Do you want to hear the rest of the story and how I met *Quan*? He's an important part of this story as he turned out to be my linkage to the general," Jonathan asked looking at the nodding heads.

Jonathan talked about his feelings and his regrets, and how he had to disassociate himself from everyone. He spoke about his concerns with saving the general's life that night, taking out his anger on the killers of his adopted family, the killers of the young Vietnamese woman he adored.

Lan's father had told him to phone a Vietnamese who was close to the general, and use his name. To identify himself clearly stating why he needed to see him as a matter of urgency.

Jonathan called and spoke to a Vietnamese, a friend of Lan's father. At first the man on the phone didn't believe him, but the caller insisted and told him about the bombing the night before. In Jona-

than's mind he saw no connection; the general's friend saw something. He told the foreigner to wait on the phone for five minutes while he spoke to someone. He didn't ask for a location of the call, but he did say that they would not be tracing the call.

Jon waited; his nerves on edge. The sweat rolled down his face as he waited in the hot afternoon heat.

A voice, with an American accent, came on the phone saying abruptly, "This is Sloan. You may be who you claim to be, and then you may not be. *Quan* will pick you up within thirty minutes, and we'll meet. We'll talk," he barked as the receiver was handed to another person.

THAT EVENING AT EIGHT O'CLOCK, a lone figure walked down the street towards the general's house. The skies were cloudy, rain probable during the night. Streetlights in the residential area were non-existent.

A car was parked at the curb ten feet from the front door. Two men watched the door, waiting for it to open. They had guns waiting for the man leaving the house. They didn't see the lone man until he walked up to the car and spoke.

The agency man turned quickly and raised his gun and collapsed, a silenced shot fired into his upper chest. The other man stared, started to talk and stopped when he recognized the intruder. Then he raised the gun quickly and died; the bullet fired from his own gun.

Two minutes later, the general walked out of the door with six Military Police who took over. *Quan* walked up from the other side of the street, saying to the general, "The backup team is over there immobilized. They'll talk when you're ready."

The general nodded his head and walked to his car where he stopped and turned to face the young man. When he spoke, Jonathan felt his life had changed courses permanently.

"Young man, I need your help. Your life has been changed tonight by circumstances. You can't return to your job. If you did, you'll be dead soon. You saved my life tonight, and now I owe you mine. We will work together because I need you more than you need me to stop

this crap with the drug cartels. Are you in or out?" he asked getting into his car and looking back at the young man.

Jonathan looked at the older man, saw the determination in his eyes, and he recognized hope for the future in that determination.

"Do I have a choice, Sir?"

"We all have choices. I know what mine is. Do you?"

"Fine, General. How do I contact you?"

JONATHAN TALKED FOR A FEW HOURS about the last two years as a friend of *Quan* and how the relationship developed with the general. He spoke about the general's plans that they had developed together for the future. He told how the general and he had devised a scheme to siphon off drug money from the agency rogues using the banks in Laos and Cambodia. They needed to avoid Vietnam for political reasons, but it would become part of the bigger picture in later years. They needed time to organize.

It was a long-term plan, and Jonathan had developed the contacts and the methods. Together they had already relieved the drug cartel of about thirty million dollars, and there was little that they could do about it, without disclosing their hand. They chased the wrong people. They suspected that unknown persons within the agency were tapping into their funds.

Each time they closed and changed accounts, more money would disappear, but they needed the banks to funnel the money into the Golden Triangle for supplies. The cartel was sending in more money through the banks but buying less each time as the money supply started to dry up.

Over the past two weeks, Jonathan had agreed with the general to operate differently. They had the cartel's money as a base. They needed time to put the operation into action. That was the reason he needed to reach Laos for the next phase of the strategy to tackle the cartel. It would take a long time, and both the general and Jonathan had recognized that they couldn't operate through legal or diplomatic channels. The cartel had bought their way into the top echelons of governments. And they used international banks to launder the

money. The cartel was well-organized and untouchable. And it was controlled by a few military brass and by a group of rogue American CIA agents.

Jonathan stood up and stretched. He walked over to the end of the clearing and turned around slowly, looking at the small group, the people closest to him. He smiled at them as they stared.

"Tien, you ask what's going to happen to our country?"

"Yes, Jon. You've given us a lot more information and some answers. But you're going to tell us something else," the old man said smiling moving closer to his wife.

"You need to know that the money we're taking from the rogues will be destined for Vietnam, particularly the South at some point. They were robbed by the rogues, and they will be destroyed by their new masters from the North," he stated emphatically walking over to sit with the group.

"When will this happen?" ask *Tuyet* looking around at the others, realizing this conversation was beyond her comprehension.

Jonathan smiled at her, understanding her question of what was really happening realizing that she didn't grasp the full implications answered.

"*Tuyet*. It may take ten to fifteen years before anything happens. North Vietnam will take control of the South through the communist party. They will run the country without having the skills. They will destroy and try to break the will of the people. But in the long run, the North will need to seek outside assistance from other countries to rebuild the entire country once they've destroyed it."

He sat back, scratched his head, and lifted his arms to feel the cool breeze coming from the river.

He looked at *Quan* and *Anh Phon* who understood clearly the long-term plans of The Sloan Foundation. A foundation set up to rob the rogues and build a fortune to hand back at the right moment to the people in the South for education and the elimination of poverty. They knew the risks, and they also knew that it would take years before the communist masters in the North would concede and ask the outside world to help them rebuild.

Leaving It Behind

"*Tuyet*," Jonathan said, smiling at her innocent face. She smiled back at him, her dimple appearing where it should be. Her blue eyes sparkled with the pleasure of being included with this man and the new family.

"The Sloan Foundation," he continued, "is the creation of U.S. Army General Alexander Sloan for the sole purpose of accumulating wealth from the American military and CIA rogues, and ultimately returning that money to the people of the South. It will take time before the North reaches out for help, but it will happen. We are the implementers of Sloan's plans. The next step of the plan starts in Vientiane after we arrive tomorrow.

Once we arrive in Vientiane, I must make arrangements for you and your guardians to leave for France. We will always remain in contact, and I'll see you whenever I can. You, my little snowbird, have become part of my life. Curse that old woman back there," he said smiling, walking off into the forest.

Tuyet jumped to her feet to follow him but was stopped by *Anh Phon*.

"Don't *Tuyet*. Let him go. He's growing up a little."

The young girl turned and looked at her friend. Her eyes were moist as she smiled her understanding.

"I know. We both are growing up a little."

FIVE

SERGE BERNIER, THE BANKER, SCREAMED in the confines of the small room. The two Asian bankers, seized this afternoon on George Street, watched in horror from the other side of the room. They didn't move. They were too frightened to budge. They knew they were next, but they didn't know the answers to the questions that bellowed from the speakers on the walls of the church. Bernier couldn't move his hands to shut out the noise. His hands were secured behind his back. The larger speaker was behind and above his head blaring. The monologue continued.

"Who are the leaders of the bank scam, Bernier? Tell us, and you may live, or you may die. Your friends in the corner are part of the scam, and they will regret their decision to join you and your leaders. Who are they Bernier?"

Click and rewind. A few minutes of reprieve, and it began over again. Click and rewind. The three men screamed at each other in terror. Bernier lowered his head in defeat.

One hour later, the heavy wooden door slammed against the wall, bouncing back to be closed loudly. The three bound prisoners stared at the tall man, and watched as an Oriental walked across the room. *Quan* walked over to Bernier and cupped his hand harshly under his chin, as Jonathan shouted.

"Where are they, Serge? Tell us and live. Tell us who you saw in Saigon last week?" he demanded, looking over at the two Asian men who just sat and stared, terror written on their faces. They knew they were next.

Bernier lifted his eyes when he heard the soft voice. An accent he knew from many years ago and a man who he had hoped that he would never see again. He hated the man, and he feared the brutality of the man when provoked.

"Answer the questions, Serge. I don't care whether you live or die. You do remember what you tried to do in 1975, don't you? You haven't forgotten *Tuyet* and her guardians have you? Now answer *Quan's* questions and get it over with quickly. The sooner you answer the questions, the sooner you'll avoid the pain."

The taller of the Asian men stared at the tall man and screamed, forcing Bernier to look at him.

"He's right Bernier," Jonathan said softly. "You should talk. Avoid the pain and spare these men the pain later when you don't talk."

The Frenchman spat out blood from his busted teeth and from his bleeding lips where he had bitten himself.

"Get it over with, Langston, you swine. I should have killed you when I had the chance, but I wanted to taste the young girl badly. You returned too soon," he hissed through bleeding lips.

"Yes, Serge. I did return too soon for you," he sneered, turning to face the terrified Asians. He smiled at them and turned his gaze slowly back towards the Frenchman.

"But I missed you also, didn't I? You dove out the window into the river below just in time. You were ready to rape the young girl *Tuyet*. Did you know her name, you pig? I'm sorry that I missed you when you jumped. I did search for you for months but eventually gave up. What happened to you anyway?"

"I...I left Vientiane and went to Bangkok. Laos was no longer a safe place for me."

"And what happened?" shouted Langston, forcing the man to look at him.

"I stayed there for a few years and got a job in a bank and progressed up the chain. And I don't know why you're holding me. I don't know the answers to your questions. I don't know the so-called leaders you're referring to. Now, get out of my life, or kill me now," he shouted, casting his eyes over at the Asians, watching *Quan* who was slowly twisting a silencer onto the barrel of his gun. His eyes grew wide, sweat rolled down his face as he watched the slow deliberate action of the man standing in front of the Asians.

"Serge, you and I are going to talk, and then we're going to take a trip. Tonight a report was issued to the Stock Exchange naming you or is it Rene Blanchard, and the chairmen of two Australian banks for laundering money for the American mobs. The National Crime Authority is now involved. Tomorrow, I'll leak to the papers that Blanchard is really Bernier who was involved in the drug cartels during the war set up by a few rogue CIA agents. And you were their middleman. So much for your reputation as a banker," Langston said smiling at the man.

He turned quickly and nodded his head at *Quan* who lifted the gun and fired. The noise didn't exist above a pip. Bernier watched in fascination at the slow curl of blue smoke floating above the circular barrel. He was fascinated that it didn't move faster. He could almost see the projectile of the bullet as it entered his upper chest, drilling quickly into the flesh. He felt the impact of the bullet as it left his back, shattering his shoulder blade. Moments later, he felt the excruciating pain setting in as he was slammed against the wall chasing the bullet. He moved slowly to the floor, the chair flipping over with the impact and his backward movement. He stopped moving. His head drifted to the side, blood running from his mouth.

The two Asians screamed in terror. The taller one fainted, his head hitting the table breaking open his forehead before he hit the floor. The short, heavyset Japanese retched over his companion before voiding everything in his bowels into his trousers. He stood and watched the scene in slow motion before he followed his colleague to the floor.

"Quan, get the cleanup boys in here quickly. Get these clowns to ASIO in Canberra. Have ASIO put the Japanese counterparts into the picture quickly and start putting diplomatic pressure on those Japanese banks. We know another part of the story now."

"Okay, Jon. I'll do that tonight," *Quan* said leaning over to look at the two Japanese bankers. He laughed and said looking at them.

"They don't make Japanese like they use too," he laughed. "Anything else?"

"Yes. Keep Bernier under raps for the moment. Take care of his wounds temporarily so he has mobility. We're going to let him escape shortly and watch his movements. We need to find out which banker he contacts first," he said, as he turned and walked over to look at the two Japanese.

"These guys will not be contacting Tokyo as scheduled and that will throw them into a panic. Let's keep them off balance for awhile. Revive Serge-boy, and put him on the street tonight without shoes and track him. He's a dead man now, and he knows it. We don't have to do it, but he's going to give us a few clues. Is *Thrang* coming to Saigon with us?"

"Yes," *Quan* said smiling, unscrewing the silencer from the barrel. "Your little speech convinced him to go home, to help us, and to watch our backs. Do you really think it's going to happen this fast and in our own backyard?"

"Yes, and we're caught right in the middle until we start the downhill roll. We don't have much time left, if we're to stop the financial crisis in Asia created by the bank group and backed by the drug cartel. We need to find the leaders, and destroy the organization before it's too late. Now let's get moving," he ordered stepping over the Frenchman and walking towards the door.

He stopped and turned, saying, "You know where to reach me. The general and I have a lot of things to talk about before we go after the American banks. We've isolated the possibilities down to two banks. Tomorrow should give us the answer."

"All right. I'll stay in touch. I'm going to play a few mind games with this character the Asian way to force him into a compromising position, like in the old days," he laughed returning to his work.

"Good. Prepare yourself for a return home over the next two days. Your wife needs to see you. Get *Thrang* involved in everything."

"He's involved now. Some of the tricks he has forgotten, but he'll pick them up quickly."

Walking over to his younger friend, he said, smiling, "Jon, you need to go to her. She's waiting for you in *Nha Trang*. Stop wasting time, my friend before it's too late. She needs you, but you need her more."

"Yes, I know. It's finally becoming really clear to me," Jon said smiling at his friend, his eyes relaxing as he walked toward the door.

He stopped as he opened the door and said to *Quan*, relief in his voice, "Tell *Anh Phon* to let her know that I'm coming home for her at last."

THE AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE had put out an alert to all police in Sydney. The alert was an order that the local police found unusual, but didn't argue.

*Track a well-dressed man, but do not apprehend.
Report his position at all times, but do not interfere
with anything unusual about the man.*

The location of the surveillance was announced. A description of the man issued. The order was specific. Watch, but do not under any circumstances interfere.

When the broadcast hit the police frequency, there was maneuvering behind the scenes for policeman to be near the location. Something was going down, and they wanted to be part of it even though they couldn't be involved. The mystery of the order was better than walking the normal beat. It added something to a boring job that they could use in the rumor mills around the force. The instructions said to watch, don't touch, and to report. And don't use the normal radio fre-

quency. A special frequency was assigned which was noted even by off-duty policemen in the area. They were instructed to cordon off the area discreetly and to allow no one into the defined sector. They were to wander around at a distance, but keep the local people out of the restricted zone for a short period of time.

At about 2200H, a gray late model Ford sedan sped down Macquarie Street heading for the Opera House on the beautiful Sydney Harbour. The late ferries were pulling into Circular Quay to drop off, or to pick up the last passengers.

Activity around Circular Quay was heavy for a Friday night; all the restaurants were full. The bars were overflowing with the normal end of the week crowds, professional people from banks, legal and accounting firms, stock brokers and foreign exchange dealers. Over strong drinks, they shared insider stories that they would not normally do. Bars were designed to do a little inside trading on a Friday night when the senior masters were out of hearing distance.

It was all part of the game on the fringes of the financial district of Sydney. The players could drink and pass on secrets and catch the last ferry to their destination. And if they were lucky, they could pick up a score for the weekend. The merrymakers from the bars overflowing on the sidewalks were a mixture of male and female. And no one saw the difference of matching partners in an opposing firm. It gave the players a competitive edge on the Monday morning at the office, if they didn't have a severe hangover.

The senior people knew about these bar crawls. They had been there before and escaped without being caught.

The sedan screeched to a stop midway between the Opera House and Circular Quay.

The front doors of the sedan opened quickly. Two men walked to the back door of the car and helped the semi-conscious passenger out of the car.

The well-dressed man was unsteady on his feet as they helped him to the wide sidewalk that followed a wide concourse around Circular Quay. They slowly maneuvered the man so that he was placed mid-point on the sidewalk and faced him in the direction of the ferry

docks about 500 meters ahead. That was the direction they wanted him to go.

The older Oriental stood in front of the man, asking, "Serge, do you know where you are?"

The banker looked slowly around, shaking his head to clear the fog from his drugged mind. He wavered slightly on his feet and turned in a circle.

"Yes, at Circular Quay where I can catch my boat home," he said slurring his words.

"Do you want us to help you to walk, or can you manage by yourself?"

"No, I think I can manage. What time is it? I have lost my watch." He tried to lift his left arm finding that a sling secured it. He grimaced in pain and returned his gaze slowly towards the two Asian-looking men, catching his balance.

"Serge, you have enough painkillers in your pocket for the weekend. I would suggest that see your personal doctor tomorrow. Is that clear, Serge?"

"Yes, but why is my arm like this? I don't remember too much," he said staring out toward the harbor watching the boats bounce over the waves as they maneuvered towards the Quay.

Quan looked at the banker and smiled. The man was now primed, set to put another part of the plan into action. He slowly walked around the banker, forcing the man to turn with him.

He walked over to the water's edge and turned facing the tall man, saying, "Serge, or is it Rene Blanchard? You were shot tonight. We found you and fixed you up the best we could."

Quan couldn't be sure whether it was the mention of the second name, but the banker stood straighter, shook his head, and shouted, "Why are you calling me Serge? My name is Rene, and I'm a respected banker."

"You were a respected banker, Rene, but you blew that cover by becoming involved in the drug rackets with a few bad CIA agents years ago."

"I don't know what you talking about," he shouted, starting to walk towards the Quay. About ten feet away, *Quan* shouted at him, forcing him to stop.

"Serge, tonight, you're to call your two bosses involved in the bank manipulation with the other overseas banks. Those are your instructions now, and you must do it quickly before you catch your ferry."

"What kind of crap are you talking about?" he shouted back and grimaced as the pain became more pronounced with his quick movements.

"Very simple, Serge. Your leaders must be warned that we know who they are, and a trap is being set for them. Now, go quickly and warn them. Your ferry for Mosman leaves in twenty minutes. You have enough time. Now hurry!" *Quan* shouted at the man.

He turned quickly without looking back and walked towards the sedan where *Thrang* waited for him. He opened the car door and got in. He nodded his head at Jonathan's new recruit, a man he would have killed years ago during the Vietnam War.

The audible sound of Bernier's struggle to breathe could be heard from the speakers in the sedan. The man was wired and anything that he said tonight would be recorded. *Thrang* smiled beginning to enjoy the game of being back in action and seeing a purpose in his life. They listened to the banker as he took one agonizing step after the other, his head becoming clearer, and his breathing easier.

Thrang started the car and followed the banker. As they pulled up close to him, *Quan* lowered the window and shouted, "Serge Bernier, you had better hurry and make those phone calls, or you'll miss your boat trip home!" And the car sped off turning left and disappearing up the hill.

The banker stared at the car, shook his head wondering why this was happening. Slowly, the fog began to recede, and he could feel the cool breeze coming across the water. He heard the noise and was aware of people talking as they walked passed him. He stared after the car, watched it disappear and started walking towards the Quay quickly, but stopped. He looked down at his feet.

He stared at his feet in confusion. He had no shoes on his feet. For the first time, he realized that he was barefooted, and he felt the coolness of the pavers on his bare skin. He looked at the people who passed him; some of them stared at him and continued walking. He heard a comment about him from an elderly lady to her male companion.

"Look, that man's well-dressed, but he's wearing no shoes. He must have had an accident. His arm's in a sling, and you can see blood stains on his shirt. I wonder what happened, my dear," they commented to each other as they continued their walk arm in arm.

The blond man looked down at his feet and started walking briskly, unsure of his steps at first as he picked up more mobility. He knew that he needed to make a phone call quickly from the Quay. He needed to warn his colleagues so they could get a message to the leader. It was urgent that he make contact. He looked up and saw people milling around in front of the telephone booths. He needed one for himself, and the words he needed to say were private, to be passed on immediately and not to be overheard. He rehearsed the words in his fuzzy mind. He only had a limited amount of time, and the message had to be precise. As he stepped one foot after the other, he wondered how he would die. Once he broke the code of silence and passed on this message, he knew he was a dead man.

As he neared the line of telephone booths, he saw an Asian man dressed casually walking up to him quickly, asking, "Excuse me, sir. Are you Mr. Serge Bernier?"

Bernier stopped and looked at the man. He wasn't sure but he had seen him somewhere. He shook his head to clear the cloud. He was in a rush to call the others, and he wanted this intruder out of the way. His head was numb, and the pain was getting stronger in his shoulder. Why am I without shoes, he wondered as he looked at his feet.

"Never heard of the man," he shouted as he continued step after painful step towards the telephones.

"Surely you must be Mr. Bernier. I have a phone call for you," he said, handing a cell phone towards a bewildered man.

Leaving It Behind

"I told you that I'm not this Bernier. Now, get out of my way!" he shouted, weaving his way around the Asian. As he reached the rows of phone booths, he stopped again when he heard a voice behind him.

"I'm so sorry, sir. The call was for Mr. Rene Blanchard. Are you Mr. Blanchard?"

The banker stood and looked at the Asian and took the proffered handset with his good hand and spoke harshly, "This is Blanchard," and threw the handset on the pavement when he heard the voice coming from the cell phone. "Get out of my life, Langston!" he shouted and stared at the device at his feet. He shook his head quickly to clear his mind.

The Asian smiled and picked it up and walked away grinning as Blanchard stared. He turned slowly and walked to the phone booths, stopping at one in the far corner, which was the only booth without an "out of order" sign. He found a dial card in his shirt pocket, wondering where it came from. Awkwardly he inserted the card with the receiver tucked into his neck and punched the numbers, still wondering why the card was in his shirt pocket.

The conversation was being recorded, but the Asian was close by hoping to have a glimpse of the numbers being punched with shaky fingers. The number rang, and Blanchard spoke.

"This is Blanchard. Listen and don't speak. I only have thirty seconds before this call can be traced," he paused to breathe deeply to clear his mind and the image of Langston's voice in his ears. He felt the anxiety in his gut, the uncertainty of what had happened to him. When he continued, he focused on every word. The message had to be communicated precisely. There was to be no mistake, no misunderstanding.

"Activate Plan B quickly, and get the message to N, the leader, that I'm out of action and dead after tonight. Pull the other banks into line now and make sure Pearson and White fall into line now. They are the final link to the plan here. Contact them tonight. The American banks must advance their plans now. It goes back to the sequence in 1974. They will understand.

"Make sure N understands that B is essential now. I was captured and tortured. They let me loose to track me, hoping to learn something. I'm wounded now. Langston is alive and must be killed as quickly as possible, or he will interfere and cause problems. I don't know who's backing Langston. But I've been set up to make this last call, which is untraceable. Get the message to N. Activate B, and kill Langston, and use his friend in *Nha Trang* as the setup," he finished hurriedly hanging up awkwardly with his good arm.

He turned around slowly. The effort to concentrate to deliver the message had drained him of all energy. He moved unsteadily on his feet, trying to focus his attention on the wharf area, trying to remember which dock his Mosman Ferry left from. Was it number three or was it four, he tried to remember feeling the pain returning to his shoulder. How much time did he have left before the last call? He tried to lift his arm but remembered that he didn't have his watch. What happened to his Rolex? He continued concentrating and looked around.

He reached into the jacket with his good hand, thankful that the pills were in that pocket. He grabbed two and popped them quickly into his mouth and swallowed them with the moisture in his mouth. A fix going down his throat to relieve the pain.

No one was in the area, and it was Friday night, he remembered. There should be many people here, some of whom he would know and who could help him get home. Could he make the boat, he kept asking himself, as he started to wander towards the terminal buildings, and then stopped.

"I'm going in the wrong direction," he said to the man standing beside him. "Can you help me find the wharf for the Mosman Ferry?" he asked and looked at the man next to him. He stared and closed his eyes. When he opened them, the man had disappeared. He shook his head and turned again going in the opposite direction. As he turned the corner, he stopped and looked at his feet and collapsed, hearing the wailing of sirens coming closer to him.

"What's happening to me?" he asked the man standing next to him. "Why don't you help me? I'll pay you if that's what you want,"

he shouted as his head hit the pavement jarring the inner recesses of his brain. The sirens kept coming closer. Blanchard opened his eyes slowly, trying to lift his head but collapsed again. The man had disappeared.

"Where are you?" he shouted.

THREE MEN STOOD LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW from a heavily paneled office on the 20th floor in the triangular shaped building at Circular Quay. They could see the entire wharf area and could see the milling people at one end. The normally heavy crowds were outside the restaurants and milling around the bars. At the other end, there was no one visible in the area where on a normal Friday night, it would be packed with people.

The only inhabitant in that area of the wharf was a well-dressed man wandering around lost, looking for his ferry. The three men in the office couldn't see that the man at Circular Quay had no shoes, but they knew he didn't. It had been part of the mind game designed by *Quan*.

They saw the man fall to the pavement in the distance, waving his good arm as if he was talking to someone, struggling to get to his feet. In the distance they spotted the ambulance turning the corner, all part of the plan. Within ten minutes, the wharf area would be back to its normal Friday night scene, minus one Serge Bernier, and no one would be the wiser.

The men watched in silence as the ambulance picked up the man. It drove away, and people appeared miraculously in the area. At first, mostly men, and then the crowds changed to a mixture of people. The primadonna financial whiz kids appeared, stalking their female companions for the weekend. The game for them was on again. They had been allowed back into their stalking grounds.

The three men stood solemnly, each deep in their own thoughts about the events of the day and the revelations of Bernier that boomed from the speakers on the recorder in the middle of the office.

The younger man turned and walked to the center of the office, taking a seat in the oversized chair in front of the desk. He no longer

needed to watch the people below. The scene had been orchestrated for the benefit of the French banker, to learn anything possible about the banks and perhaps learn some information about the leaders of the financial manipulation. He sat in thought thinking about the words of Blanchard or is it Bernier, he wondered. He had known the man by both names, but which was his real name he kept asking himself. Who was Bernier speaking to? He kept asking himself. The man had enough control to be aware of the time limitation before they could trace the call. He had made that clear to the person on the other end of the call.

Jonathan reached over to the recorder and punched the rewind button, stopping it at the beginning of the conversation of the drugged man. What were the clues, and what was the real message that he had relayed? He kept asking himself that question over and over

The older man walked over and stood in front of Langston, watching the facial expressions of the younger man. Jonathan sat back in the comfortable seat and listened to the words with his eyes closed. He was absorbed with the labored sounds of the Frenchman bouncing from the speaker. The recorded message reached the end again. He sat up and punched the rewind button again and sat back in his chair.

A short portly well-dressed man walked over and stood beside the older man and asked, "What are we achieving by listening to this recording over and over?" he asked as he pulled his chubby fingers through his graying hair. He stopped and massaged his heavy jowl with his fingers, trying to understand the meaning of the younger man's actions.

The tall elderly man turned and smiled at him, saying gently, without being too discourteous. "That's the problem with you boys at Langley, Fred. You're too absorbed with your spy satellite data and are shielded by your inner sanctum of protection that you forget that there's a real world out here. Things happen out here that never get picked up by your computer wizardry at Langley. It's called the human factor, and far more deadly than the cloak and dagger junk that you fantasize about from your electronically generated reports."

The man called Fred smiled at the rebuke and walked over to take a seat by the younger man who was listening to the recording again. He had slowed the words down. He was writing down each word that was spoken by Bernier's voice.

He looked up as he put down the pen and stopped the recorder, saying with a smile, "General, we have a real problem and I'm not sure where it's leading us," he said as he rubbed his fingers under his tired eyes. He stood up and walked over to the window and looked down at the crowds on Circular Quay.

He turned quickly, saying angrily, "Everything's back to normal for those Friday night specials of the financial world down there. But we're really goofed up in this ivory tower. We have words from a drugged man, a crook from years ago, but he hasn't given us a clue. Unless, I've missed something."

He walked back to his seat and picking up the piece of paper he had written on.

He looked at Fred and smiled, sitting down and saying, "I'm sorry Fred for that little outburst. But this thing is beginning to make me angry, and that's when I think best."

He looked at the man whom he considered a father figure. The general was chuckling, enjoying seeing the man from Langley out of his depth. The general started to say something but was interrupted by the man from the States, who threw his glasses on the table in front of him.

"You guys are amusing. You make fun of us, General, and our electronic tricks, but you can't see the bigger picture of this French game," Fred said rolling his eyes, mocking them.

"And ... don't stop there, Fred. What are you trying to say?" asked the amused retired Brigadier General of the U.S. Army, the founder of the Sloan Foundation, and the pursuer of the benevolent causes of the foundation as defined in its original charter. And the boys from Langley didn't even know about that original pact.

"He's only involved in channeling dirty money into a safe haven for the drug cartels in America and Europe. It's nothing more than

that. And he's using his banking system which has operations in Australia, Europe, and in our country."

"That's only one part of the story, Fred," the general said sitting down in the chair opposite the man. He continued watching the expression on Jon's face.

"Some of our old colleagues, yours and mine, are the leaders of the supply and distribution side of the operations. They're also involved through the banks in the laundering operations. It's quite simple, but it goes a lot further than that."

"Oh come on, General," the agency man said smiling, looking over at the younger man and back to the general. The man left little doubt that he was in control and continued speaking, showing authority.

"I've read all the reports about the rogue agents from Vietnam and the military brass. But most of them are dead or locked up. They're out of the picture in this scenario," he chuckled standing up and walking over to the windows. When he turned around, he noticed that both men had picked up their papers, preparing to leave.

"Where are you guys going? We haven't finished discussing this bank manipulation yet."

"Yes we have, Fred," said the general smiling. "You can go back to Washington and look at your computer reports, because we need to be in the field. There are a few people closely connected to the agency who are very much involved. And they started off in the Vietnam days."

"You're crazy, Al. We've caught them all; it's not possible with our security screening today. Get real, Alexander," the agency man said abruptly, walking over to stand in front of the general and the younger man. He started to say something but stopped when Langston spoke, sarcasm in his voice.

"Fred, you really are out of your depth on this one. There's a financial crisis brewing in Asia. It's orchestrated for the benefit of selected banks in this country, your country and Japan. And the final benefactors of the scam are the drug cartel, and they're controlling the banks for the laundering operations and to buy financial control of the

Southeast Asian countries to preserve their source of supply for the drugs. Once they have control, they have the finance, supply, and distribution wrapped into one organization and then," turning to pick up his briefcase, he said, "And then Fred. They'll control the governments of those countries in one neat little package."

"You're nuts, Langston!" the agency strategist shouted angrily.

"I know. You've said that before, but that's precisely what this game is all about," Langston said looking at the general smiling, amused with the Langley man's naivete.

"And who are the backers of this organization with no name? It's not possible that any one connected to the agency can be involved."

"We don't know at this point but the answer lies in Southeast Asia, more precisely in Vietnam, which is what Bernier's comment meant. Go back to the sequence in 1974."

"And what is that supposed to mean?" asked the bewildered agency strategist.

"It means that Bernier was there at that time. He has also passed on a message to the leader of this organization to activate something that happened in that year. The same sequence. We need to find out about that sequence, and we will not learn anything in this country."

"What are you're talking about, Jonathan? The cloak and dagger show vanished years ago. Get off your James Bond trip, will you!"

The agency man turned towards the windows again, frustrated with the conversation, angry that he was losing control of the discussion.

Jonathan reached for a piece of paper on the large walnut desk and wrote out three names and handed it to the general, who read it and handed it to Fred. The agency strategist, from his protected domain, read the names and shook his head, his mouth open in disbelief. He stared at the two men who were watching him.

"What is this? I hope it's a joke, " his voice level rising in anger.

"Sorry, Fred, but those three names are closely connected to the Asian drug cartel, and we will nail them. How close to the top of the organization they are is only a guess at this point. But they are close,"

the general said as the two men turned to walk out and stopped at the sound of the angry voice behind them.

"You are crazy, General. Two of those men work for me."

"We know. That's why you're here with us now, and not sitting on your fat behind in Washington. Now Fred, get your butt into gear, to use your language, and follow us and listen as we go. Keep you fat trap shut for awhile, and maybe you'll learn something about the old days," the general said sternly, losing his patience with the career bureaucrat.

The general followed Jonathan to the door. A bewildered agency strategist stood in the center of the office staring at their backs and looking at the piece of paper in his hand. Is this for real? he wondered as he looked at the paper. He noticed that the two men were waiting for him at the door. He grabbed his case.

Jonathan's cell phone rang. He punched a number on the dial face and spoke.

"Yes," he answered as he listened and then shoved the instrument into his pocket after saying abruptly, "Find him! And pull out all stops. Get the Federal Police involved immediately, and meet us later."

The general looked at Jonathan as he turned to face him. His jaws were clinching, the anger brewing.

Jonathan said in a monotone voice, watching the reaction of the man, "We have a problem, General. That was *Quan*. They turned Bernier over to the ASIO guys, and he's gone."

"What do you mean he's gone?" the general asked looking confused.

"Outside the safe house. *Quan* turned the man over to ASIO and left to meet up with us. *Quan* has just learned that the two ASIO agents were killed. Bernier has disappeared," he said walking out the door, and down the corridor leaving a dumbfounded general standing, blocking the doorway, confusion spreading over his craggy features.

SIX

THE SOFT BREEZE FLOWED THROUGH HER HAIR. She stood on the bluff overlooking the sea and the islands in the distance. Her hair floated in the air current. Her black hair became more pronounced as the sun melted into each strand. She turned slowly enjoying the feel of freedom, savoring that feel of being at home with her adopted family and the closest friends she had ever had in her life. The breeze flowed around her, moving the delicate silk material of her dress. The pale blue of the silk matched the color of her eyes, enlightening the beauty of her satiny skin. She smiled at the beauty of the landscape, the sea, and the sea hawks circling overhead, trilling their mating calls far below to their mates nestled in the trees.

The young lady slowly came out of her reverie, the sense of being at ease with one's own company, she felt.

She heard her name being called as she looked out to sea, at one with nature, as she recalled Jonathan saying frequently when they escaped Vietnam twenty years earlier. Has it been that long, she thought, as she turned to see *Anh Phon* walking around the bend below leading from their secluded home in the valley below.

Tuyet's blue eyes sparkled as she saw her elder Vietnamese sister; she smiled warmly, enjoying being with *Anh Phon* again. She didn't want to leave this country again but there was one thing missing, and she needed to see Jonathan, or just to speak with him. The last time she spoke to him was three months ago when she was deciding what

to do. She had been preparing to leave Paris, to rebuild her life, and to start writing another novel. She had told Jonathan that she planned to write the story about their escape from Vietnam. He had chuckled on the phone, enjoying the moment and happiness of her decision. Why not, he had said, and wished her good luck and said that he would be out of touch for a few months.

She thought at that time that she would return to Dalat, to the place in the highlands not far away from where she grew up as a child until her life fell apart. That life was almost destroyed by the Americans bombing her family's home by accident, they said, and killing her entire family. She had spoken to *Anh Phon* several times and decided to come to *Nha Trang*. She needed to spend time with her adopted family until she decided where she wanted to live. Money was no problem, and Jonathan had deposited funds into her account frequently to keep her going. The royalties from her first two novels were beginning to flow into her accounts making her feel secure from her own earnings. She knew that Jonathan never questioned her need for money, and he was always there to help when she needed it.

You are an adorable man Jonathan Langston, she thought, and I need to be with you. You've always been so kind and gentle with me. But you never ask for anything in return except for me to be safe and happy. Where are you my loveable man? She looked out at the sea trying to draw an image of his smile, his physical presence.

He was so much a part of her life, and had been, since he saved her life those many years ago, saved her from the most degrading humiliation imaginable. The old lady in the Delta was right, Jonathan Langston, she thought. Our destiny is tied together, and it will only be time before we are together. Where are you and what are you doing? She wondered what he was up to, as she watched *Anh Phon* walk briskly over the bluff.

She thought often of Jonathan, the little boy that she knew during the escape had grown up, but he still hadn't decided to settle down and have a permanent life.

"Oh, my dear Jonathan. You're still running from your past, from your childhood. Accept things as they happened, and find peace

within yourself. Stop running from yourself, my love," she said aloud, watching the distance close between *Anh Phon* and herself.

She started walking towards her friend, wondering what was the problem to bring her up the hill. She knew *Anh Phon* hated walking in the hills, terrified that she would run into one of the many snakes claiming the hills as their territory.

Tuyet kept thinking about Jon as she walked towards *Anh Phon*, the breeze flowing through her hair. She remembered how he had come to her rescue again and saved her from a disastrous marriage, a marriage with a Frenchman that was doomed to fail from the first day, but she hadn't seen it fast enough. Marc Lavoie was a good man in the beginning of the marriage, but he had turned into a rogue quickly.

One woman wasn't enough for him, and he favored the good life that his parents had given him. The life of a spoiled brat where they protected him. She tried everything to make him happy, but when she became too persistent, the beatings started. They usually happened after a drinking bout, or when he came home with other women, or didn't come home at all. She had complained bitterly to his parents, but they took no interest in her or the marriage to their son. On one occasion they said that the wedlock was wrong in the first place, and *Tuyet* came from the wrong stock for their precious son.

The beatings continued and became more severe. Jonathan appeared in Paris on a trip about five years ago, and the beatings stopped. He came to visit *Tuyet*, as he always did, and took one look at her and went silent. Later he went for a walk to calm himself. The next day he told her that the marriage was over, and she didn't need to live in fear of Marc again, nor his family. She learned soon after Jonathan left Paris that Marc had filed for a no contest divorce, and her pay out was very generous and paid happily by his parents.

She didn't know until months later that her husband had been in a serious accident and near death. He had disappeared. She had assumed with another woman. The divorce was granted, and she moved to the country to rebuild her life and to start writing, which became part of her healing process.

Over the next few years, she often spoke with Jon and knew where he was most times, but never completely the full story of his work. She knew that he was very involved in a benevolent foundation founded by the general whose life he had saved in Vietnam. But that was as far as she knew about his work. He never discussed it, and she never asked. She knew that he traveled a lot and often with *Quan*. The two men seemed to be inseparable.

She spoke to *Anh Phon* often and knew that they lived on a large estate outside of *Nha Trang* that had been acquired by the foundation. The purchase was through different controlled companies in other countries. Numerous payoffs were made by the foundation to the Provincial Party officials each year just to keep silent and to let them live there in peace. The payoffs would stop eventually, but for the moment the palms of the party officials had to be greased regularly.

Anh Phon told her after she arrived that Jonathan and *Quan* were planning to talk to the party chief when they returned and negotiate a deal to stop the illegal payments. If the Party Chief refused, they were going to pull out a few unpleasant stories about a few of the party officials' involvement in drug dealing and prostitution. The consequences would be disastrous for the party, and the party members in Hanoi would start ducking for cover quickly. Fear would run through the party ranks if some stories surfaced, when they were presenting a clean slate to the foreign countries wanting to invest huge amounts of money in Vietnam. Money that was desperately needed by the government and a trickle of payoffs to the party officials to get the deals done.

Anh Phon walked up to *Tuyet* over the last ten meters, breathing deeply from the uphill climb. She waved at the blue-eyed woman and smiled, showing her pleasure in seeing her. *Tuyet* walked quickly to her and embraced her, always happy to be with her and to talk with her. They had so much in common, and they had been through so much together over the years.

She looked closely at *Anh Phon* who was trying to catch her breath and asked, "What's your rush? What is the problem to bring

you into the hills, Elder Sister?" she laughed looking at her friend who was gasping for air.

"They're returning home, *Tuyet*," she gulped in the air between words.

"Who's returning home?" *Tuyet* asked, holding *Anh Phon* back with her arms to look at her.

"*Quan* phoned to say that they would be returning within the next few days. They're bringing a friend but he didn't say who it was. The general will be coming with them, and we need to make sure that the house is ready for everyone," she said kneeling down, breathing a little easier.

She looked up at *Tuyet* and said, "I'm not sure if Jonathan is coming or not. *Quan* wasn't sure either. Something happened in Sydney, and they're trying to find a solution to whatever it is. *Quan* thinks that Jonathan will be spending time in Saigon before he comes here, if he comes here at all."

Tuyet reached over and combed her fingers lightly through *Anh Phon*'s hair, thinking. She wanted to see Jonathan; she needed to see him. It had been so long since she last saw him.

She stopped combing *Anh Phon*'s hair and looked at her in the eyes, asking gently, "Does he know that I'm here?"

"Yes, he knows, and *Quan* said that he wants to be here, but something has gone terribly wrong with their work, whatever they're doing. That's all that I know for the moment."

"*Anh Phon* is he ... is he still with that other woman? You know, the one he has been traveling with for the last couple of years?"

Tuyet asked the question hoping that the answer was not what she was expecting. She knew that she didn't want to see him with another woman for the moment. She felt deep down that she needed to be with him alone, and without any interference from another female. She didn't need any emotional seesaws from another woman. Jonathan was her friend, her protector. He had always been there for her, and she had not seen him in five years. They needed time to catch up with each other and to spend time together.

They had never been lovers as time and circumstances had never permitted it. But maybe it's about time to change our situation, my dear Jonathan, she thought, waiting on a response from *Anh Phon*. *Tuyet* watched the expression on *Anh Phon*'s face and knew the answer before she spoke.

"My dear, loveable *Tuyet*. Jonathan left the other woman a few days ago, I think. *Quan* didn't say specifically, but I also forgot to ask him. *Quan* said that the four of them would be traveling together. They've recruited an old enemy of *Quan*'s whose coming here as Jonathan's backup, whatever that means," she said pensively turning to face the sea and looking at the beauty of the islands balancing on the surface of the water.

She turned quickly to the younger woman, saying, "Tuyet, I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking. *Quan* was rushed, and we only had a few minutes together on the phone. He did ask me to tell you that Jonathan would be coming home soon but perhaps not with them. All he said was something bad had happened, and they were playing everything flexible for the moment. I have no idea what they're involved in, particularly to get the general over here and out of his tower in Washington."

"It must be serious then," *Tuyet* said putting her arm around *Anh Phon*'s shoulder. "You're so lucky to have a man like *Quan*, my dearest Elderly Sister."

"I know and I have a feeling that Jonathan's life is changing also. He told the general, according to *Quan*, that he wanted to quit after this assignment and find a permanent life for himself. *Quan* wasn't sure what he meant because Jonathan only mentioned it to him in passing," she smiled standing up to embrace the younger woman.

As they started walking down the path towards the estate below, *Tuyet* said casually to her friend, "You know, *Anh Phon*, I love Jonathan so very much, and I don't want to lose him this time."

"I know, and we all know it. We've always known it. It has taken Jonathan a long time to grow up and to find his roots. This is the first time he has ever mentioned settling down. Let us hope he means it this time," she shouted as she raced ahead.

"Come on, *Tuyet*. I'll race you home. We have a lot of work to do to prepare for our men."

Tuyet watched her friend run down the slope feeling the freedom of the moment. She started running tasting the sensation of the breeze as it flowed around her and through her hair.

GENERAL ALEXANDER SLOAN'S HAND HIT THE TABLE in anger as he stared across the table at two very embarrassed ASIO officials who had flown into Sydney on a special US Air Force jet. Jonathan and *Quan* stood at the side watching the interchange between the men. The ASIO men slumped in their chairs, not wanting to be part of the general's rage. Fred Wakely from the CIA paced the floor enjoying the conflict. Sloan leaned across the table and demanded an answer.

"How did it happen, Gentlemen? Are your people so incompetent that they can lose a man that held the key to this entire mystery within thirty minutes after we turn him over to you? I want an explanation and I want it now," he yelled as his hand hit the table again emphasizing his point.

A voice behind the general stopped him, as his hand was ready to slam the table again.

"Oh come on now, Alexander. It's not necessary for all this theatrics. So you've lost the man. He'll be found again, I'm sure."

The CIA man stepped back quickly when the general wheeled around, staring at him coldly, his eyes penetrating the man from the CIA headquarters in Langley. When he spoke, the air turned cold in the hotel suite.

"Fred, if you open your rotten mouth again, or even try to interfere with this matter, I'll pick up the phone to the Oval Office, and I'll have your fat incompetent butt removed from Langley forever. The only job you'll ever get is cleaning streets, and as far I'm concerned, right now, that's the only thing you're capable of doing," he sneered, stepping closer to the man who was looking around for support.

No one was coming to his rescue as he stepped back from the tirade of the general. His mouth dropped open when the general shouted.

"Do I make myself clear Fred? You're so hung up on your computer bull that you haven't even figured out that two of the men on that list work for you, and they have been involved in this drug cartel operations since the war!"

Stepping closer to the man, he demanded sternly, "Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, but I thought you were being unduly rough with these gentlemen. We need to work with them."

"Fred," said the general. "No one is being tough. They goofed up, and I want to know why. You're here because you screwed up badly in Washington. You're here to learn what happens out in this real world. So sit your fat butt down and listen."

Turning quickly to face the stunned men from Canberra, he asked, "What happened, gentlemen? We have a meeting in about six hours in the office of the Chairman of the Stock Exchange with two upset bankers. We've summoned Pearson and White through the chairman of the Exchange. The news coverage about their bank's involvement in drug racketeering and money laundering has caught them by surprise. Stock prices will plummet on Monday morning, and their jobs will be on the line. We know they're the decision-makers, and we also know about their secret accounts in the tax haven where they're paid handsomely. Now gentlemen, what about it? Do we work together, or do you get the same treatment as your cousin from Langley?"

The general turned to look at Jonathan and smiled, relaxing as he stated, "Jon, this reminds me of the old days when we didn't have the sophisticated rubbish that they have now. I'm enjoying this. But we need to find Bernier," he stated emphatically.

"How do we find him?"

The general turned slowly when he heard the voice behind him. The tall senior agent from ASIO sat forward in his seat and said, "Al, we're wasting time here. We also must find Bernier. He is the key to a lot of questions. Two of our men were killed tonight, and we want to

know how and why," he said turning to look at his colleague who was absorbed in the interchange in the room.

"We have a leak in our organization. Bernier's whereabouts were only known by a few people. Someone in ASIO made that hit, and we need to find the traitor immediately," he said without any hesitation as he turned to his colleague.

"Isolate everyone involved tonight, and I don't give a rat's behind how many men we use or how much it cost. Get McCord over at the National Crime Authority involved immediately. The NCA can handle the exit points in the country, and lean heavily on the underworld, starting now. Wake up the leaders. If they resist, lock them up without any reason and hold them until I say otherwise. Pull in all our best men. If we start a war with the mob tonight, I really don't care. It's time to put pressure on them," he said standing and walking over to the general.

"Al, we have work to do. If Fred wants to learn a few tricks, he can join us. I don't think it's a good idea for him to show up with the bankers this morning. He's out of his depth," he challenged looking over at the stunned CIA Agent who wanted to defend himself but decided to keep quiet.

"All right," said the general. "We'll stay in touch. Spare no costs on this one. Bernier must be found. I suggest that you wake up your Prime Minister tonight and brief him. This thing is going to get nasty. I'm calling our President now. Have the Japanese been informed?"

"Yes, on the way here from Canberra. The senior bank executives have been pulled in for answers to some tough questions at the Prime Minister's orders, and it's the middle of the night for them. I wouldn't be surprised if there aren't some suicides reported later today. The Japanese don't like political embarrassments, and money laundering on this massive scale will not be tolerated by their government," he said over his shoulder as he walked to the door followed by his colleague.

NINE O'CLOCK ON A SATURDAY MORNING is not a good time for anyone to be summoned for an explanation at the Stock Ex-

change, particularly after the Friday evening and Saturday morning newspapers had front-page headlines of a massive bank scandal. The chairman, Sir Greg Watson, made no excuses and told the chairmen of the two banks that if they did not appear, the bank stocks would be suspended from trading on the Monday morning.

The two chairmen arrived before nine o'clock with their attorneys, prepared to answer questions but not knowing what questions were to be leveled at them. The attorneys pranced around the huge reception area talking to each other about plans of defense. Occasionally, they would talk to the bankers to get clarification on certain potential issues. They needed to be prepared to defend their clients; they were paid hefty retainers to keep their clients out of trouble.

The secretary watched them; the intercom on her desk was open on the instructions of the chairman. People were in his office listening to the conversations between the four men. Not every word was heard but enough. Glenn Pearson, the chairman of East Coast Bank sat near the secretary's desk and spoke about the deals with George White of the Australian Bank Corporation. Both men were regretting that they had been roped into the deal. It was good money for the banks, clean funding with very little risk.

And the retainer fees paid by the offshore merchant bank that masterminded the deal were paid secretly into their accounts in a tax haven. No one would be the wiser. No one would know the real mechanics of the financial manipulation. Or so they thought, until they received an envelope at the office last evening instructing them to contact the other chairman involved and also to contact the Stock Exchange chairman immediately before the news hit the air and papers. They had always suspected that their banks were being used as vehicles for laundering illegal money from drug activities in other parts of the world. But the sheer amount of low cost funds was irresistible to the bankers.

They were worried men, and their attorneys were there to defend them. There was a simple solution, a quick defense that they knew nothing about what had transpired with money laundering through their banks. They were prepared to pass the buck down the line if

necessary. The attorneys knew nothing about the tax haven fees paid to them by the merchant bank, and they would not be told.

Pearson leaned close to White asking quietly, "Do you think the chairman knows anything about Triangle Bank Holdings?"

"I doubt it," White answered questionably, a frown appearing on his forehead. "Why do you ask such a silly question?"

"Our banks have had over five billion dollars flowing in over the past six months. The original source of those is unknown to us. The only thing we know is that Triangle acts as an intermediary for wealthy investors in other countries. We have acted as a money market, a foreign exchange placement vehicle for the merchant bank. It has been good business for our banks, and the dealers love the arrangement that we've set up."

White turned to look at Pearson, concern written on his craggy face. He looked over at the attorneys standing next to window looking out over the square below and wondered what strategies they were scheming up. All the information they had were the letters that were almost identical for both banks and the newspaper coverage. The late night television news was brief and only speculation. Both chairmen had been unavailable for comments to the hounding journalists during the evening. Neither man had slept well last night.

"I don't like this George," Pearson said to his friend from Australian Bank.

"Neither do I. We can, as bankers, operate secretly as a cartel in forcing advantages for the banks through the Reserve Bank and the government. We normally don't come under scrutiny nor are we questioned about our real motives. We, as bankers, control the country's financial future. We make huge profits, and we operate on the fringes of the regulation as long as it suits us," he stated turning to glance at the attorneys who were walking towards them.

"But being summoned to the Stock Exchange like this scares me," Pearson whispered, as the two stopped in front of them.

Lanky, casually dressed Brian Epson from the largest law firm in Sydney looked down at the two bankers and smiled. He turned to his colleague saying, "Chairman Watson has kept us waiting long

enough. It's nine-thirty, and we have more important things to do than wait around an empty office for a man who has no control over the banks," he whined shoving his hands in his pockets.

George White, the younger of the two bankers, stood and spoke angrily, his eyes glaring.

"Brian, you work for us and you will wait with us or your firm will do no more legal work for our bank. Do I make myself understood? I really don't have time for your arrogant self-centeredness. Now, you have a choice, and I really don't care which way you decide. I've been thinking about changing legal firms anyway because most of the time the advice we receive is crap anyway," he said emphatically turning his head quickly as the heavy wooden door to the chairman's office opened, and a deep voice boomed out the door.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen, for keeping you waiting. And you're right, George, about his arrogance. Tell these clowns to leave, and go somewhere else. You don't need them this morning for what we have to talk about," he reassured, smiling at the stunned expression on Epson's face.

"But I insist that we stay with our clients, Greg," Epson said walking over towards the tall well-dressed Chairman of the Stock Exchange.

Watson was enjoying his moment and smiled at the two bankers who were standing, preparing to go into the inner sanctum of Chairman Watson's office, but stopped when Watson addressed the attorneys who were about to walk around him.

"Epson, I really don't care who you are or who you represent. You're not invited, and you will not attend. Now get you stupid arrogance off my floor before I call security. And the next time, you'll address me by my proper title of Sir Gregory," he challenged smiling at the lawyers who were unsure what to do. The chairman's eyes grew cold as he looked at the lawyers.

"Now, get out of my sight, both of you," shouted an agitated Sir Gregory Watson, turning and walking into his office with two stunned bankers in tow.

Watson shut the door slowly after telling his secretary to take no calls and that no one was allowed on the floor until they finished their meeting.

The Chairman of the Exchange stood and smiled at the two aging bankers staring at the four men in his office. They turned slowly to face Sir Gregory. Pearson was the first to speak.

"What's this all about, Greg?"

"You'll find out soon enough, Glenn. Come over. Let me introduce you to a very old friend of mine. We knew each other well during the Vietnam War days, and we both respect each other's talents," he said smiling at the expressions coming from the bankers at the mention of war days.

The chairman continued speaking as a tall, well-dressed man turned from the window and walked over to the bankers with his hand extended.

"Glenn and George, this is Retired U.S. Army General Alexander Sloan, who is a special security advisor to the President of the United States. He has a few questions to ask both of you about the news headlines, and quite frankly I would like to hear your answers," he said pointing to the seats at the far end of the large office.

As the bankers took a seat, they watched the Orientals sitting at the table and another tall westerner who was standing near the window watching them.

White looked at Watson, asking slowly, unsure of what to ask without his protective legal beavers with him now. I should have insisted that they stay, he thought.

"Who are these men, and why are they here, Greg?"

"I'm sorry, George. These gentlemen are colleagues of General Sloan, and they always travel with him. Jonathan Langston over near the window and Generals *Quan* and *Thrang* at the table," he introduced the men, stopping as he watched the blood drain from the bankers' faces. The fear came into their eyes; their mouths opened. White tried to say something but stopped. Pearson sat back further in his chair as an attempt to put distance between himself and the Orientals.

Watson was enjoying himself and asked, "Do you gentlemen have a problem with these people attending the meeting as it does concern them, and you personally, as you will understand."

"How will it concern us personally?" asked an agitated Pearson glancing at White.

General Alexander Sloan walked over and pulled up a chair and sat in front of the two men and stared. The bankers looked over to see the man Langston walking towards them and taking a seat by the general.

Langston spoke first, as the heads of the two men rotated between the two men.

"You two gentlemen are bankers. The public is supposed to trust you," Langston said pausing. He smiled and continued without taking his eyes from them.

"And we don't trust you. You're as low as they come, and both of you should be locked up," he said firmly while sitting back and watching them take the first jolt.

"We don't have to take this crap," shouted an agitated George White as he turned to face Watson who had taken a seat behind his enormous desk.

"Oh, but you do, George. I suggest that you cooperate fully before things go too badly for you," he said punching the button on the speakerphone as it rang loudly. The eyes of the bankers followed the movement of Watson's hand as he spoke.

"Yes, they're here, and they need a little convincing so they can understand how much we know and how deep in manure they're in," he said turning to smile at the two visitors to his domain.

The voice boomed from the speakers on the chairman's desk. The bankers went silent as they heard the voice that was familiar to every person in the country.

"Glenn and George, this is your Prime Minister, and you will cooperate with Al Sloan and Sir Greg, or I will personally have your rear ends locked up for obstruction of national security. Do I make myself understood, or do I have the NCA come in now? They're outside Sir Greg's office now. Your choice, gentlemen, and I really don't

care one way or the other. When I heard about your little caper last night, it took a lot of convincing for me to do nothing. What's it going to be?"

Pearson looked at the younger man who had opened his jacket. He saw something that scared him protruding from a shoulder holster. White arrogantly sat up and spoke towards the desk.

"Why should we cooperate with them, Mr. Prime Minister, when we've done nothing wrong? We're above any suspicion of any wrong-doing. We're bankers, and people must trust us."

The chairman smiled as the Prime Minister's voice cracked across the room.

"No one can trust either one of you, George, especially with the ten million dollar payoff that you each have been paid in the Cayman Islands by Triangle. You will listen and you will cooperate. Al, please keep me posted when you can. I spoke with your President about thirty minutes ago, and he is one angry man. He's going after the American banks today but not until you speak with him. Thanks, and bust those two idiots. Keep the media out of this thing. Our government can't afford a scandal created by these characters."

There was a pause, and they heard the Prime Minister laughing, saying before he hung up, "Bankers must be trusted. That's rubbish. Those idiots must live in a toilet bowl!""

The two men stared as Jonathan placed a photocopy of a bank statement on the small table in front of them. They stared at the papers, mesmerized that they were able to obtain a copy about a secret bank account in a tax haven.

"Where did you get that statement?" shouted Pearson.

"From your trusted banker in the Caymans," said a smiling General Sloan who picked them up and handed them to *Quan* standing next to him.

"Why are the Orientals here?"

"George, they're here because I want them to be here. Now, let us talk business because this will be your last opportunity to come clean before all hell breaks loose."

The general turned to look at Jonathan and smiled, enjoying the challenge and the game he had learned from Jonathan and *Quan*. He turned and looked at the bankers.

Smiling, he asked, "The first question is where is Serge Bernier?"

THE TWO BANKERS SAT IN FEAR, speaking reluctantly at first not knowing what was ahead of them. The dreadful bank statements were sufficient proof to hang them for life if the truth came out. They were caught and there was no way out. The general enjoyed playing with them. They kept looking at Sir Gregory Watson, Chairman of the Stock Exchange, for support. Watson ignored them and read some documents on his desk and occasionally looked up, smiling at their discomfort.

They mumbled about not knowing any Serge Bernier, until Sloan slammed his hand on the small table shouting, "But you do know Bernier! His real name is Rene Blanchard, and he's your contact man in this scam. Now, where is he?" he asked looking across at *Quan* and motioning him over.

He whispered something into his ear and *Quan* walked out the door. Jonathan sat quietly watching the bankers.

Both men were uncomfortable with the situation. It was not often that they were interrogated; in fact, never, and they did not like losing control. Both men could see their lives, their reputations, and their financial fortunes crumbling before their eyes with each word spoken by this American. They watched the gray haired general and dreaded the next question. Pearson turned to face Langston who was playing with invisible lint on his suit. The man looked tired but alert. Who is that man, thought Pearson, when he heard the booming voice of the older man.

"I'm waiting for your answer. Where is Blanchard, your boss in this caper?"

Pearson looked and stammered a response not sure how to answer.

"The last time I saw Blanchard was at a meeting over at the Reserve Bank about two weeks ago. We don't travel or frequent the

same associations. I know nothing more than that," he finished looking at White, who shook his head in tacit agreement.

Sloan stood quickly and walked behind them asking as he moved, forcing them to turn their heads.

"How much dirty money does Triangle have on deposit with both of your banks, and why?" Sloan asked as he continued walking around the room, watching them.

"I'm not sure," stammered White, glancing at Pearson. "Maybe a billion or two in various currencies. Why is it important? We run banks, and Triangle is an important client depositing huge amounts for investment reasons for their clients."

"And where does Triangle get those funds, Mr. Pearson?" asked the general who was standing staring at them and smiling. He continued without waiting for an answer, his voice level rising. "You don't ask? A merchant bank that shuffles huge amounts of money around the globe into Japan, America and Europe through banks, and you don't know? And you were paid a bribe not to ask questions and to keep your honest banker's mouth shut."

The general looked at Jonathan and smiled, asking, "What do you think, Jon?"

"I think that we should turn them over to the NCA, make another announcement to the media that the top bankers in the country are a fraud-crooks who are taking bribes and laundering massive amounts of money for the Asian, European, and American drug cartels. In fact, they must be one of the leaders of the drug syndicate and want to protect their money," he suggested, smiling as he watched the expressions on the faces of the bankers as they saw their lives disintegrate before them.

Sloan walked around to face them while looking at the chairman.

"Sir Greg, we know each other well. We both respect and trust each other. What do you think would happen if we issued an instruction today, through your Prime Minister, to block a U.S. six billion dollars held on deposit by these two clowns? What would happen to these two guys, and how will it affect their stock prices?"

Sir Gregory Watson started laughing and stood from his desk. He looked at the two cornered bankers, realizing that their careers as bankers were finished as of that moment. He walked over to stand in front of them.

Without any feelings for their futures, Sir Greg said, "They will resign as chairmen of their banks today. A public announcement will be made that they retired for personal reasons. Neither resignation related to the other. Instructions are to be issued by them now to their Managing Directors to block all funds they hold on behalf of Triangle in any operation of their banks, and that will be backed by an order from the Prime Minister. Those funds are to be held in trust by the Australian government until a full investigation is completed. And that could be for years. Legal action will start immediately against these two bankers who can't be trusted."

Turning to face Sloan, he asked, "And where is this Blanchard or Bernier?"

"We don't know. Two ASIO agents were shot early this morning after we turned him over to them. He escaped. We don't know who's behind it," he said turning quickly toward the bankers.

"Who are the real owners of Triangle, and don't tell me you don't know," he demanded.

White started speaking slowly, asking at first if they would take it easy on them. He changed his mind and started talking rapidly when Jonathan Langston placed an automatic with a silencer on the table in front of them.

The information that came out from the bankers astonished the Chairman of the Stock Exchange. When Sloan and Watson called the Prime Minister two hours later, the bankers heard words that they didn't want to hear.

"Lock those jerks up, and throw away the keys. Keep the media out. I'll call the Managing Directors of both banks now and issue orders to block all Triangle funds now and transfer anything remotely connected to Triangle into the Reserve Bank. Go after them Al and Jon, and good luck. Where are you heading now?"

"To Asia and to Vietnam, Mr. Prime Minister," said a smiling General Alexander Sloan. "That's where Triangle is located, and it is controlled by the same rogues who set it up originally. The rogues from the CIA and the American mobs control it. This is going to become amusing and maybe a little dangerous. I'll call the President shortly and block the funds in the American banks. The Japanese Prime Minister is, at the moment, interrogating the chairmen of the two Japanese banks. Expect some suicides before the day is over," he added saying farewell and turning to the two stunned Australian bankers.

"You're finished. And you're going to prison. If it was up to me, I would pull the trigger on you now, but it's not. There are some men from the NCA waiting for both of you outside. And I don't care if they never release you. It's people like you that I've been hunting since the war. You're nothing better than the drug dealers. You operate the laundromat for them," he spat, turning to walk to the door.

SEVEN

THE PHONE RANG IN THE FRENCH COLONIAL VILLA in *Nha Trang* on the Southern coast of Vietnam. *Tuyet* and *Anh Phon* were sitting on the veranda talking, enjoying the cool breeze flowing in from the South China Sea. Sunday was always their favorite day. They could relax and wander around the estate, walk in the hills or go to the beach to mix with the foreign tourists who were beginning to visit the country.

The government had opened the doors to Vietnam. Foreigners were allowed to travel freely, as long as they showed their passports and visas so that the government officials could keep track of them. There was freedom of movement as long as the police knew where the tourists were located.

Anh Phon's mother came quickly out on the veranda and handed her the portable phone, smiling and looking at *Tuyet*.

"It's *Quan* on the phone, calling from Saigon. They'll be home this afternoon on the last flight."

She turned quickly and returned inside the house as her daughter spoke, the excitement growing in *Anh Phon*'s voice.

Tuyet sat quietly listening, hoping to hear a mention of Jonathan's name. Was he coming home? She wondered as *Anh Phon* dominated the conversation, stopping only at intervals to listen. *Tuyet*'s anxiety level increased as she listened, that feeling of dread coming over her, a sensation that an important part of her life would not be returning

with the others. *Anh Phon* finished talking and listened for a good ten minutes and then said goodbye.

She put the phone down on the table. A frown appeared on her face as she looked out over the manicured grounds surrounding the villa.

She turned to face the blue eyes that were staring at her questioningly and said slowly, "Something is terribly wrong. The boys are involved in a major crisis involving the governments of the United States and Australia. They're bringing their search back to Vietnam where *Quan* says it all started."

"What are you talking about?" *Tuyet* asked, confusion written all over her face.

"*Quan* couldn't say too much on the phone, but they're tracing the leaders of a massive laundering racket. A group that got started during the war with drugs," she said, looking at her close friend, seeing the concern and confusion on her face.

When she continued speaking, the story of *Quan* and Jonathan's life became clearer. *Tuyet* began to understand how they were connected to the general and why Jonathan always operated in secrecy. For the first time since Jonathan saved her life those many years ago, she became really concerned for him, afraid that something terrible would happen to him. He was in a risky situation, and she didn't want to lose him. She looked at the grounds around the villa trying to calm her fears for Jonathan, wanting desperately to be near him.

She turned slowly to face *Anh Phon*; a smile appeared disguising her fears, the dimple appearing on her right cheek that flashed with her blue eyes. She asked the question knowing that the answer would not be the one she wanted.

"Is Jon coming home this afternoon?" She asked and sat back in her seat to watch her elder sister closely, waiting for a response.

"No, *Tuyet*. *Quan* said that he's chasing a French fly in Australia, but he'll be home in a few days. *Quan* wouldn't elaborate, and I have no idea what's going on," she said as she reached over to touch the younger woman's face to give her reassurance that things would be all right.

Tuyet could feel the tears coming in her eyes, the concern about the possible dangers facing Jonathan. What are they really involved in, she wondered, as she looked at *Anh Phon*. She held back the tears.

"Elder Sister, what is going on? What are they really involved in that they have to be so secret about? And why did the general appear in Vietnam so suddenly?" she asked picking up the napkin to wipe her eyes and dreading the story that *Anh Phon* was going to tell.

Anh Phon knew that *Tuyet* needed to know the answers to the questions that she asked. She needed to be sure that Jonathan was safe. *Quan* had told her to tell *Tuyet* everything she knew, as one of them was in danger. Someone had issued an order to use one of them as bait to trap Jonathan Langston.

Anh Phon picked up a napkin, wiping her eyes, feeling the emotions run through her small body, saying, "One of us has been marked to be the lure for Jonathan, to force him into the open, so they can eliminate him as an obstacle to whatever their plans are and kill him. *Quan* doesn't think it's you because we're the only ones who know you are here. And they don't think that the general is a target yet."

The Vietnamese woman stood up and walked to the end of the veranda thinking. She turned and looked at *Tuyet*, and smiled briefly.

"I'm the target to catch your man, *Tuyet*. It's the only answer. Now I need to tell you what they're involved in, what *Quan* has just told me. What they've always been doing since the day Jonathan saved General Sloan's life from the CIA assassins those many years ago."

She took a deep breath. "The general and Jonathan set up a long-term strategy to destroy or obstruct the drug operations of the rogues, and they're still concentrating on that area. They watch, create contracts, and impede the drug cartel's operation in any way they can. They work closely with the law enforcement agencies involved in stopping drug trafficking. And over the past few years, they've targeted the banks that are being used as money laundering vehicles for the cartels. Only a few people in the American government know what they're doing, and the President of the United States is one of them. Not even the CIA knows about what they're doing. Al Sloan has never trusted the agency since the war days."

Anh Phon walked over and sat beside *Tuyet* putting her arm around her shoulders, the bonding between the two women absolute. The trust between them was unquestioned. She started to tell the story, as *Quan* had just explained to her, so both women would understand the dangers ahead of them.

She explained that Jon and the general had organized protection for them, and they would arrive late in the afternoon on Monday or early Tuesday morning. The general was traveling to Laos for a quick meeting with some banks before *Nha Trang*. Jon, she explained, had organized for the *Montagnards* of the Central Highlands to camp out on the estate and to be their protectors.

"Jon worked with the *Montagnards* during the war, and they trust each other without question," she explained.

"The group of hill people are brutal, and they'll kill anyone coming too close to their charges. The Vietcong feared the *Montagnards* during the war. They showed no mercy and would kill without hesitation to protect their villages, and they have a passionate hatred for the Vietnamese and particularly the North Vietnamese. When the North won the war, they had set out on a course to eradicate the *Montagnards* from Vietnam but failed with the intervention of the United Nations and the Americans. The North Vietnamese tolerated the other ethnic tribes in the North, but they feared the brutality of the *Montagnards* and did their best to annihilate them. Today, they keep their distance as much as possible, and the government officials in the North avoid any contact with them."

"These mountain guerrillas from the Central Highlands had been effectively used by the French and later the Americans to fight the North Vietnamese with their own tactics. Guerrilla warfare was the game, and the *Montagnards* were the best and feared no one when it came to protecting their people and destroying their Vietnamese enemies."

"Jonathan had gotten to know them, to trust them as he set up the intelligence network to track the drug operations in those days. They, in turn, respected and trusted the young man who told funny stories, who was always smiling, and who was concerned for the safety of

their children. He and they did everything possible to be sure that their children were safe from the drug lords working in the highlands bordering Vietnam and Laos."

"Jon, through the foundation, provided money secretly to the hill tribes to rebuild their lives and to educate their children. The money came secretly to the foundation from bank accounts supposedly controlled by the drug lords, but a large portion was siphoned off into Jon's control for the foundation."

"The *Montagnards* owe him a great debt, and he owes them respect. They worked together and memories go back a long way, as far they're concerned. He called them to protect us, and they are coming without asking questions."

"Do you mean to tell me that Jon and *Quan* have been doing these things since we escaped Vietnam all those years ago?" asked *Tuyet*, surprised that she had been shielded from their secret life.

"Yes, and it was for your protection and mine. I always knew that *Quan* was involved in something. But he never talked about it, and if I pushed for an answer, he would tell me only bits and pieces to keep me quiet. But until now, he has never told me the full story. Al and Jon purchased this place for us, and the payments to the party officials have been generous to keep them silent," she said smiling at the memories of moving to *Nha Trang* after it was safe to return to Vietnam from Laos.

She went on to explain to *Tuyet* as much as she could about Jon and *Quan's* movements over the years, the dangers they lived with, and the near misses when they tackled the cartel, which was getting bigger and better organized.

"Jon had a personal vendetta against the drug pushers and suppliers because he lost a brother in Saigon during the war from a drug overdose. That was before he met the general, and it was one of the main reasons that forced him to confront the general when he accidentally learned of the assassination attempt on Sloan's life."

Tuyet watched *Anh Phon* closely as she told the story of Jon and *Quan* and their devotion to a man like Sloan. "The three men worked in unison and had one driving ambition: to wipe out, if they could,

anyone dealing in drugs. The general had the backing of the United States Government where it counted, and they had all agreed that the CIA was not part of that trust."

"So the Sloan Foundation was formed to attack silently the hidden leaders in the drug world. Money earned by the foundation came from Jon and *Quan* craftily stealing large amounts of money from bank accounts controlled by the mobs. It was a simple process, sometimes too simple, by working within the banking system."

"Bankers were bribed to cooperate. And once the banker was on the take, it became easier to pull them into the scam against the cartel even further. The mob couldn't scream to the authorities for help because their cover would be blown. The banks were siphoning off the money, and they never knew it was the foundation. It was dirty money earned by selling death to young kids around the world."

Anh Phon stopped talking and walked to the end of the veranda, looking out over the manicured grounds again, and watching the small fish jump about in the small pond near the villa. She had talked a lot, and she felt emotionally tired. She turned slowly feeling the presence of *Tuyet*, who was standing beside her. They looked at each other.

Tuyet stood wiping the tears from her eyes. She leaned over and embraced *Anh Phon*, saying gently, "You're a very lucky woman my elder sister to have *Quan* as a husband and to have Jon as such a close friend and protector."

"I know, *Tuyet*, and Jon was always there for you. He never wanted us to talk to you about his work, as he was concerned that it would upset you."

"But why not? I'm an adult and not the child that he saved," she asked, confusion showing on her lovely face. She attempted a smile, but it didn't appear. She was feeling a little let down by Jonathan not trusting her.

Anh Phon watched her friend, her sister, gently understanding the feelings.

"Jon always trusted you but in his own way. Like *Quan*, he was protecting you from the knowledge of what he was doing. He knew

you would worry, and he didn't want that. I don't think that our boy could handle worrying you too much. He often confided in us about his feelings for you and his concern for you, even after you married Marc Lavoie. He worried about you being hurt by that man."

"What do you mean? He never spoke to me about Marc except to wish me happiness with him. He really didn't know Marc."

"Oh but he did. Jon found out a few things about your husband through his own connections, and he was afraid for you. But he didn't want to interfere with your marriage. He was being a silent protector, and he watched over you," *Anh Phon* said gently reaching over to touch *Tuyet's* face.

"But he never said anything. He phoned often and visited me every time he was in Europe, but he never said anything against Marc or our marriage. Why not?" she shouted angrily looking closely at *Anh Phon*, waiting for an explanation, prepared to lash out in anger if it was the wrong answer.

"It's very simple, *Tuyet*, to use Jon's words. He was deeply in love with you and has been since the escape. He wanted to share his life with you when the time and age was right. He waited too long. You met Marc, and he felt guilty about losing you, but he accepted it reluctantly. He was always there for you, silly girl. He is coming back for you, and he wants out of the drug chasing business. He asked *Quan* to tell me this to pass on to you if it was necessary. But he -- they -- need to survive this last caper. It's going to be dangerous. A contract has been put out on Jon's life, and he doesn't want you, or us, caught in the crossfire," she said smiling as she turned to walk back to sit with *Tuyet*.

"*Tuyet*, my sister, believe in our Jon. We're safe with him, and he does love you very much. He always has, but he needed to grow up," she said, as she stood up.

"Come, let us walk to the back of the estate, and say our thanks to your guardians who have been protecting this villa. You know," she said slowly, "it was Jon who insisted that they be buried here. He's a wonderful man, *Tuyet*. He doesn't ask much for himself, but he gives a lot to us and others."

As they walked into the coconut groves at the back of the estate, *Tuyet* let the tears flow unashamedly. She was a happy woman, and she longed to see Jon and to throw her arms around his neck. You're not getting away from me this time, she thought and smiled, feeling the breeze flowing and massaging her skin.

JONATHAN LANGSTON SLAMMED THE CAR DOOR behind him in anger. Canberra, Australia was not his favorite city in the best of times--too many politicians and the corporate hawkers selling their wares at inflated prices to the bureaucrats. The payback for the government officials was an extravagant dinner in restaurants normally reserved for diplomats.

Jonathan walked into the main foyer of the central headquarters of ASIO, Australia's intelligence body equivalent to the American CIA. A uniformed security guard approached the man dressed in casual clothes and asked his reason for being in the building dressed in street clothes.

Langston looked at him and smiled thinking that the British pompous attitude would never change even though the Brits had lost most of its empire. The accent was definitely British, and he was working for the Aussies. The colonials employing their former masters, he thought, as he looked at the man speaking with a drawn out Yorkshire accent.

Jon started to explain why he was in the building, when the guard's phone buzzed. He lifted it to his mouth, spoke and listened and turned to Langston, saying quickly, "I'll take you to the chief, Mr. Langston. Please follow me, sir," he said respectfully as he turned, walking rapidly toward the elevators on his left without saying another word. No wasted motion for this guy, thought Jon, as he followed the man while glancing around at the sparse decor in the lobby.

As he followed the guard, his anger subsided slowly. The news that he was going to hear and the sequence of events was not why he came to Canberra.

He only came to ask the Japanese a few questions, and Saturday afternoon was not a good time for them to be put under the micro-

scope. He needed more information about their bank's involvement in the laundering game. He needed the codes that they had, and the sequence of moving money from Triangle Bank Holdings to the Australian banks from the Japanese banks, and back to the American banks where it originated as dirty money. And he needed information on the true owners of Triangle.

General Sloan had been in constant communication with the Oval Office, and a plan had been agreed upon to tackle the American Bankers. Sloan had told Jonathan about the plan before he caught the special chartered jet for Vietnam, the first stop Laos, to talk to some people that Jonathan knew well.

Sloan's last words to Jon were, "I would hate to be in the shoes of those bankers when the President finishes with them. They are in trouble, and they don't even know it."

Jonathan was prepared for the Japanese. He now had news about the Japanese Prime Minister's talk with their bank's chairmen in the early hours of the morning. Both men had left the Prime Minister's Office in disgrace. Media coverage had been denied, and the Special Police had placed the men under protective custody, more to keep them from committing suicide in humiliation than anything else.

They took the elevator and stopped on the tenth floor. The guard never said a word. He only stared at the numbers as they climbed higher in the building. The doors opened and the guard issued an order.

"Follow me, sir. We'll go down to the Guv's office now," he said as he walked quickly down the corridor, the sounds of his heavy footsteps vibrating on the walls. He stopped at the door and tapped rapidly before opening it.

Jonathan walked in and was entombed as the door shut behind him with a clang. Reginald Sandhurst stood in the far corner of the large office. His suit was loose fitting and made him appear skinnier than he really was for his six-foot frame. He walked around his huge desk, motioning Jonathan to take a seat.

He said with a smile under his moustache, "Jon, two of my colleagues will be here in a moment. We've got a bloody big problem,

and you need to know about it. I couldn't tell you on the phone. Intercepts and all that rubbish, you know."

"What could be the problem? I only wanted to talk to your Japanese friends, and I hope they haven't escaped," he said with a sarcastic grin.

Sandhurst flinched at the rebuke, smiled, and said softly, "No, the creeps are still here singing their bloody heads off, and everything is being recorded. They were only the messengers to set up the final phase for their two chairmen who have disclosed everything to the Japanese Prime Minister. The PM's sending his special police down today to collect the garbage. The Japanese PM is talking with the U.S. President and our PM, and they're preparing to block all funds held by Triangle in any bank they can find on Monday. Then, hopefully, we can watch the leaders go mad," he said smiling and sitting down on the couch opposite Langston.

The door behind Sandhurst's desk opened and a waiter entered carrying a tray with coffee, tea and biscuits. He placed them in front of the men and poured their choice, turned and disappeared by the same door. Langston stood and walked to the window looking at the view of Lake Burley Griffin and the new Parliament Building in the distance. The views had a calming effect on him as he turned and walked to his seat. The Director of ASIO spoke slowly to Jonathan, gauging his reaction.

"Your name was mentioned a few times by the fellas from up North. Apparently, they know a lot about you in your search for the drug leaders, and they're all concerned. It's a mystery to them who you're working for. They don't think you're on your own. We'll go down shortly to see them, but I can tell you one thing. They're terrified of you with that little trick with Bernier when your man pulled the trigger," he sat smiling and continued talking, chuckling.

"I don't blame them. What you and *Quan* did, and the clinical way you did it, would have scared the bejesus out of me. Just don't do the same thing to me," he said laughing as the door behind them opened, and two men walked in.

The shorter man said hello to Reg, not Reginald, and introduced a Jason McCord from the NCA. The men sat down. Jonathan stared at the men. McCord looked like the saddest man on the map, sitting behind a droopy moustache and a matching pair of sad eyes. He was losing much of his hair, and it looked like he hadn't slept in days.

The other man was short, dressed in casual clothes and sand shoes, and had the reddest hair that Jonathan had ever seen for a man. The red hair was punctuated even more above the pale blue eyes. Where do your ancestors come from? Jonathan wondered, looking at the man.

The man noticed Jonathan's curious look, and said, "It's okay, Jon. My parents are Irish but from a different village than Jason. It's all inbreeding you know or so they tell me," he said laughing. "People often stare at me and then tell me all their miseries for some reason. It's why, I guess, I'm in this spook job," he laughed, looking over at Sandhurst, who was pouring them coffee.

The man with the red hair continued slowly. "Jason flew down on the same plane as you this morning, because we both needed to talk to you. I'm sort of Reginald's strategist in the agency, and he likes to hear what I'm up to when I disappear occasionally," he said turning to face Sandhurst, who was laughing at his colleague's humor.

"By the way, my name is Geoff Cairns, and I travel a lot. Like Jason, we chase the baddies inside and outside the country, but you stumbled onto something that we couldn't pick. Are you ready to hear what we have to say before we visit the clowns downstairs?"

"Yes but we need to discuss everything and leave nothing out," Jonathan said. "The general's on his way to Laos, and I'll explain why later. I'm heading for Bangkok and then to Saigon, through Cambodia, for the same reason and to see some bankers. The ones who we're talking to are okay. I've known them for years, and they can be trusted. The ones we're dealing with here can't be trusted. What has happened to Pearson and White?"

"They're downstairs as well, singing their little heads off like good little canaries," Cairns said flashing a set of perfectly matched teeth. "You caught them with the goods, and they don't want any public

disclosure. By the way, your man from Langley is being kept out of the talks with the bankers. We don't trust him. He keeps yelling about a conspiracy against him and the agency by you and the general. As far as we're concerned, he can catch the next flight out, but that would present another problem, wouldn't it?"

"I'm afraid so," Jon said slowly looking over at Sandhurst who nodded his head to continue. "Let us talk and go downstairs. Have Fred join us, but tell him to listen and to keep his mouth shut. If he interferes, tell him for the general and me that he'll be sent back under Marine Guard escort, and he will remain isolated until the President decides otherwise. The man's dangerous," Jon said, turning to the director and saying, "Let's talk."

The men talked for an hour. The mystery in the banks' money laundering operation became clearer; the complications were defined and looked at. Strategies were identified and redefined by the ASIO master strategist, Geoff Cairns. The Irish mind was as cunning and devious as they came, and Cairns analyzed every thread to the puzzle.

A plan was decided and agreed; a strategy put into place by the group of four men. They knew now who were the executives of the Australian subsidiary of Triangle Bank Holdings. The ASIO network had traced their past history through the spy networks. They were Americans and former CIA agents who had worked in Asia and Vietnam during the war. ASIO was now searching the backgrounds of all top executives of all the subsidiaries around the world of Triangle, including the head office executives in Hong Kong. They agreed that the two Americans running Triangle in Sydney would be arrested on Monday morning and put under surveillance on Sunday night. Jason McCord of the NCA had that task, and he knew the names of the two men. He had investigated them a year earlier on financial manipulation on behalf of Chinese clients from Hong Kong.

McCord explained that the men picked up following Langston were only hired guns and knew nothing about Bernier's affairs.

"They've been charged for possession of firearms until this is over," he said. "And by that time, we'll decide what to do with them."

At the end of the meeting, McCord turned to Sandhurst saying as he rubbed his moustache, "Frank Tan and David Neetham will be interrogated here in Canberra, and they will not be released until we're happy, if that's ever the case," the tired man said standing to stretch his body.

Then he said quickly looking at Jonathan, "Your CIA friend knows the two guys. We picked up a phone call logged on his phone to Neetham earlier today. He would not have known that we've been tapping their phones for some time."

"Reg," he said turning to face the ASIO Director, "I'll give you a copy of the recordings. You'll find them interesting," he said briefly explaining the contents of the taped conversations.

As they prepared to go downstairs, Jonathan said softly, the concern flowing from his voice, "One of the women in *Nha Trang* is the target to bring me in to this mysterious leader. Both women I love very much and will do anything to protect them. Bernier made it clear on that phone call at Circular Quay. Use the woman in *Nha Trang* as the setup to draw me in for the kill. I love those two women for different reasons. One is *Quan*'s wife and like a sister to me. The other, I saved her life years ago when we escaped the South. She was a young girl then, only thirteen years old. She's back in *Nha Trang* with *Quan*'s wife and that's where we're heading now, all of us, for the final showdown. The general and I are heading for ground zero now, and there's no turning back until this thing is over. I'm not sure which of the girls is the target but I must be available to protect them both," he said sadly, thinking of *Tuyet* and wanting to go to her quickly, to be close to her. It has been too long, and he was not going to let her down again.

He spoke quickly to the men, the surprise flashed on their faces when they heard his plan and the seriousness he was taking with the threat made by Bernier.

"I've asked for help to protect *Tuyet* and *Anh Phon*. They arrive tomorrow on their bikes from their mountain villages. The general will pick some of them up with his jet on the way from Laos. The *Montagnards* are going to *Nha Trang* to protect the girls, and God

help anyone who comes close to them," he said as he turned to walk toward the door.

The three men stood watching Jonathan open the door. He turned to look at them. They stood looking at each other in shock.

"How in the world is Langston so closely connected with the *Montagnards*?" Sandhurst asked a stunned Geoff Cairns.

"I'll tell you later," Jon said as he walked out into the corridor and past the security guard from England, who stared at him as he walked down the corridor, the other men following. Langston's hands were at his sides. He was gripping them rapidly, a method he used to release his anger and nervousness.

They caught the elevator down to the basement and walked down a long, dimly lighted corridor to a set of heavy doors with a security pad on the outside. Cairns punched in the sequence of codes, and the door unlatched with a loud clang.

They walked into the control room where three agents turned and acknowledged the men and returned to their consoles. One of the men stood up and walked over to face Sandhurst. He turned to look at the other men, while speaking to the director.

"Why did he do it? He's isolated in Room Two on the screen, and he's talking, telling as much as he can. If we keep this up for too long, he a dead man. And I really don't give a cracker. We all know the penalty if we turn," the agent said as he returned to his console, listening to the drug-induced interrogation of the agency man who had pulled the trigger on the ASIO men, letting the Frenchman escape.

Reginald walked over to the console and listened. Words were coming out of the man's dying mouth. They saw his facial reactions as the men in the room asked questions. The man was terrified, and he knew the price of betrayal. It was written on his face. Death was the only option, and no questions would be asked. His family would be told of a tragic accident on an assignment. Like most families, they were never told the full story of the man's job. He worked for the Foreign Affairs Department, and that was it.

Langston and Sandhurst turned slowly when they heard a strong American accent blasting behind them.

"This is all demeaning to our profession. What are you people doing to that man? He's one of your men."

The American stopped talking when Sandhurst spun around, anger jumping from his eyes. The strategist from the CIA stepped back, looking over at Langston for support, but noticed that he had moved to another console listening to the Japanese being questioned brutally. One of the men had his head buried in his hands on his knees begging for them to stop.

"Wakely," Sandhurst said between his teeth. His anger was difficult to control.

"You had better keep your mouth shut before I phone the Marine Guards at the Embassy to escort your fat butt back to Washington and have you locked up until your President decides to release you. You're a dangerous man, Fred. It's your choice," he warned as he walked over to stand beside Langston. The ASIO Director's nerves were bouncing, and he needed to get away from the man.

As they stood watching the interrogations on the console, a hand grabbed Jonathan Langston's shoulder and pulled him around. Langston spun grabbing the man from Langley's wrist, jerking it down in a reverse lock breaking the wrist. The man screamed in pain as the bones shattered.

The men in the room looked around and returned to their work. Cairns picked up a phone calmly and called for a doctor hidden somewhere next door. The door opened, and the doctor walked over to Fred on the floor bent over in pain. He examined him quickly and gave him an injection.

The doctor stood and spoke to Sandhurst.

"I'll call for the ambulance and send him to the hospital to have it set. The injection will keep him out for the next twelve hours, but I would suggest that he be sent home."

Sandhurst turned to Jonathan and said, "The guy has been giving us the creeps all morning with his interference with our line of work. It's prohibitive to interfere. Thanks for putting him out of action."

Jonathan smiled and looked at the obese strategist of the Central Intelligence Agency lying prone on the floor, feeling no emotions

toward the man. The door opened again and two men rolled a trolley into the room and picked up the unconscious American, wheeling him quickly out into the corridor.

"Jon, you probably should call the American Ambassador and organize a flight home for him, and inform the President, however you do that," said Sandhurst as he saw the door close behind Fred.

"I'll call Alexander in a moment and let him have the pleasure. I personally don't like talking to ambassadors and presidents. They start asking too many questions," he said laughing.

With Fred gone, the atmosphere in the control room changed, and everyone started talking freely.

Sandhurst smiled and looked at the younger man. He watched the consoles for a moment and saw his man in Room Two collapse from the exhaustion of the interrogation.

"Jon," he said slowly, "Bernier has escaped our net and is heading to Asia, we think. You need to find him quickly, and the leader. We'll keep looking from this end and keep you informed. Watch for Geoffrey Cairns. He'll be watching over you in the background, but he will not have red hair or blue eyes when you see him," he indicated turning to look at Cairns standing beside him.

When Reginald Sandhurst continued speaking, it was with sadness.

"Jon, if you ever need a job, let me know. You're going to have a rough road ahead, and I wish I could be with you. You're the best man I've ever worked with, and I say that with all honesty. Be careful and good luck. And please, let the *Montagnards* know about Geoff before he loses his balls in an accident," he laughed walking toward the door.

THE SPECIAL CHARTERED LEAR JET FLEW at a thousand feet above the mountains in the western part of Vietnam coming across the Laotian border. The pilots had the speed down as slow as possible without stalling the small jet. The stall indicator was constantly beeping warning the pilots to pick up speed.

Before leaving Vientiane airport, the pilots received air traffic controllers' clearance to fly at low altitudes all the way to *Nha Trang*, which surprised them. Clearances were received from the highest level of the two governments where they would be flying. As the small jet flew down the Mekong River separating Laos and Thailand, Sloan pointed in the distance to the huge airbase at Udorn Thani used by the Americans during the war, a staging point for the B52 Strato Fortresses that flew bombing missions over Vietnam from 1964 to 1973.

As they flew over the corridor, the pilot turned to the general asking, "Are those huge craters what I think they are?"

"Yes. They're bomb craters created by the B52s dropping their unused bombs when returning from bombing missions over Vietnam during the war. The American pilots dropped those bombs indiscriminately, wiped out many villages and hundreds of lives. More bombs were dropped on Laos during that time than on Vietnam during the entire war, and Laos was not part of the war. It was a dreadful situation and something that the American government or military brass has never acknowledged publicly. As you can see, nothing is growing around the craters after all these years."

The North Vietnamese and the Americans used Laos as a battle-ground that was in direct contravention of the 1962 Geneva Accords that recognized Laos "neutrality," Sloan said sadly looking down at the craters dotting the countryside the size of football fields. After twenty years, they were still visible from the air. The villages could be seen close to the craters as they turned south heading over the mountains into Vietnam.

Alexander Sloan, sitting in the jump seat behind the two pilots, was staring down at the rough mountains below as they flew on a southeast course.

Quan and *Thrang* were standing behind Sloan competing with each other for a better view. The pilots brought the small craft into a tight circle, when asked, to give them a closer look at the mountains and valleys. The three men knew the bottleneck of this part of Vietnam. They had worked in the area, fought the North Vietnamese here,

and had narrowly escaped a few times. Thousands of soldiers on both sides had died senselessly in these mountains.

The little jet continued its slow circles as the three men talked excitedly about the areas they recognized. The small villages below tucked neatly into the valleys, protected by the high mountain cliffs. The pilots listened to the stories as the men talked, comparing memories. The general leaned around and spoke to the captain.

"I'm sorry if this bores you guys, but we're reliving a bit of history, and it's important for us. Shortly, you'll be landing in Pleiku at the old military airbase. We're picking up a few guys there to take on a ride with us."

"Not a problem, General. And you're right about one thing. I was too young to be here in those days, so the history lesson is good for me."

"No apologies are needed, Captain. It happened for whatever reason, and a lot of people died for no reason," Sloan said letting the sadness show in his voice.

They flew sedately over the southern part of the Truong Son Mountain Range that was the home of many of the ethnic minority groups of the *Montagnards*. The mountain range was renowned for its cool climate and beautiful mountain scenery with many streams, lakes, and waterfalls. The three friends chatted and pointed to the areas where the heaviest fighting took place at the end of the war.

The mist from the valleys and ranges floated up to touch the craft as the pilots skillfully maneuvered through the valleys, and the occupants looked at the mountain peaks above. Villagers ran out of their shanty homes and waved at the small craft, as it passed slowly overhead, the memories of the horrible war unknown to the children and accepted for what it was by the older generation.

The small jet took the path over Buon Ma Thot that had been a strategic military location in the Central Highlands. The area was like a natural fortress where an army could launch an attack and push down to the coastline cutting off Danang and Saigon. And that's exactly what the North Vietnamese Army did in March and April 1975, the general explained to the pilots.

"Buon Ma Thot was attacked in early March by the Communist forces, and by the end of March Danang fell, and in early April *Nha Trang* was captured. On the 30th of April 1975, Saigon fell and the North won the war," Sloan said wrapping up the history lesson as the small jet made its descent into Pleiku. *Quan* and *Thrang* told their parts of the history at the end of the war, as the tires touched down on the runway. The pilots braked the aircraft and started a slow roll to the end of the runway where the general was pointing to a small group of men sitting in the grass.

"Why are we going over there?" the pilot asked turning around to look at the old soldier who was talking to *Quan*.

"We're picking up those men and taking them to *Nha Trang* with us, if you don't mind, Captain."

"But sir, there are too many for this small plane. There must be at least twenty of those people."

"At least twenty, and they're small people, and it doesn't matter. They're coming with us, and that's the end of the story," he said emphatically as the pilot stopped the aircraft next to the group of men. The co-pilot left his seat quickly and walked back to open the door.

Quan walked down the steps, squinting his eyes adjusting to the bright glare. When he stepped on to the ground, the small ethnic people, who were all chattering, surrounded him at once. They talked, each person trying to get his word into the conversation. Alexander Sloan stood at the top of the steps and watched the happy little people with *Quan*, and smiled. So this is the famous *Montagnards* that Jon speaks so fondly about, he thought, as he walked down the stairs.

As the general stepped off the last step, several of the ethnic men looked up and saw the tall man watching them. They stepped back unsure of themselves until *Quan* said quickly in their dialect.

"This is Jonathan's father. He has come to take you to see Jon in *Nha Trang*. Jon will arrive maybe tomorrow or the next day."

Before *Quan* knew what happened, the ethnic men pushed him aside and surrounded the general, all talking at once trying to hold hands with the father of their friend. The general laughed with them, not understanding a word they were saying, he yelled at *Quan*.

"Give me a hand here *Quan* and translate," he said laughing for the first time in a long time from the gut. The laughter became contagious with the group. The pilots stood at the top of the steps mesmerized at what they were seeing below them. *Thrang* descended the steps and joined the group and joined in back slapping each other.

The captain turned to his co-pilot and smiled. "What the heck. The general's right. They're only small people so two can fit into each seat," he said laughing at the expression on the co-pilot's face as they walked back into the cockpit for preflight checks.

Fifteen minutes later, *Quan* and *Thrang* shouted something to the little ethnic people. They started grabbing their meager possessions, heading quickly up the steps. There was a mad rush to get a seat by the window, and the slowest opted out for the aisle position. *Quan* walked up and down the short aisle issuing instructions like a good flight attendant, and no one listened as they stared out the windows, their gear thrown haphazardly on the floor.

As the last few men walked to the steps, the captain's head jerked around looking at the men. He turned to face the general who was in the jump seat. "Those people are bringing guns on this plane," the captain said in astonishment, looking outside to be sure.

"Guns?" the general said looking at *Thrang*. "Do you see any guns?"

"No way, General. I haven't seen any guns. Those people wouldn't know how to use a gun," he said laughing.

"You must be mistaken, Captain. There are no guns that I can see," Sloan said laughing as the pilots raised their hands in resignation.

"Okay, sir. There are no flipping guns. Just tell them to keep those non-existent things on the floor while we fly, sir," the captain said as the co-pilot went back to close the door. The pilot had the nose of the Lear jet pointed down the center of the runway and was adding throttle as the co-pilot sat down and buckled his seatbelt.

Thirty seconds later the nose gear lifted from the runway, and there was total silence at the back. The captain and Sloan turned to look at the same time. The *Montagnards* had their faces glued to the

windows, amazed at the ability of the small aircraft to jump off the ground so quickly. The craft moved swiftly to a thousand feet and leveled off, continuing the run down the valleys. The little people didn't move; only occasional comments were passed as they recognized different villages below.

Alexander Sloan was a happy man; his eyes sparkled as he watched the *Montagnards* staring out the windows. He turned to *Quan*.

"When we arrive in *Nha Trang*, change about two thousand dollars into Vietnamese Dong and split it equally between them. Have the minibus drop us at the central market in town, and let these guys go on a shopping trip for new clothes and whatever they need. They deserve it, but make sure," looking at the pilots in front, that they leave their little toys in the minibus. We don't need any incidents in town."

"Not a problem. Are you going shopping with us?"

"I wouldn't miss it for the world. I like these people who have befriended Jon. They appear to be so gentle, but their reputation is different," Sloan said watching the men staring out the windows; arms wrapped on each other's shoulders. No, I wouldn't miss this shopping trip for anything in the world, he thought, as the aircraft climbed to ten thousand feet and leveled off.

The pilot turned to face the general, handing him the handset, saying, "It's the President, sir."

TEN MINUTES LATER, Alexander Sloan was explaining to Jonathan Langston on the phone about the President's plan on Monday morning. The presidential jet, Air Force One, would be in Los Angeles loaded with Secret Service Agents, and each member of the Board of Directors and executive management of the West Coast bank would be flown to Washington for questioning by the Secret Service and the Justice Department. No one would be told why the President of the United States was summoning him to Washington--only that national security was involved.

Another presidential jet would also arrive in New York, and the same thing would happen at the East Coast bank. A presidential order would also be issued that morning to block and transfer to the Federal Reserve all bank accounts held by Triangle Bank Holdings in any of the bank's operations around the world.

Nothing was to be released to Triangle Bank executives without the specific approval of the President, and until a full investigation of money laundering was completed.

"Ground zero is approaching quickly, Jon," Sloan said looking at *Quan*, who sat listening to the one-sided conversation. "We still don't know who the leaders are and where they're located. Maybe this maneuver will shake them out of hiding," he said as he paused moments later to listen to Jon's plans about using ASIO to tackle the Australian banks.

"That's good, Jon. I'll also tell the President to expect Wakely's arrival under Marine escort. I'll ask the President to call the Ambassador and confirm everything. And I agree with you. We shouldn't be involved in the political intrigues. See you on Tuesday, and good luck. By the way, the Laotians were tremendous. The President had the Secret Service listen to Wakely's logged calls through Langley. He's been talking to those two guys you listed on that piece of paper. They're field operatives somewhere in Asia and not in Washington. We're trying to find out where they are," he said before handing the phone back to the pilot.

He turned and looked at the ethnic people glued to the windows without a worry in the world. They were going to *Nha Trang* for one purpose. And that was to protect Jon's family, which they would do without a question.

"God help any poor sucker who crosses those guys," he said to *Quan* as they approached the coastline.

The little jet turned south at the coast, and the pilot descended again to a thousand feet and followed the coastline. The pilot turned and looked at Sloan.

"That's My Lai in front of us, General. Isn't that where the massacres took place by Calley?"

Sloan leaned forward and looked down at the small hamlets below on the coast. He turned slowly to look at *Quan* and *Thrang* remembering those long forgotten days when he was in Army Intelligence.

"Yes, that's the place of the atrocities that were buried by the high command. Calley was the scapegoat. He was ordered to do the massacres, and he was either stupid enough or just too weak to disobey. The colonel who gave the order escaped any retribution and died about ten years ago in a drunken brawl with some old Army friends. Yes," he said sadly, "that's the place, and the real story never came out. Most of it was even shielded from Army Intelligence, and the Washington politicians couldn't handle the political backlash if the real story became public knowledge."

The pilot looked ahead and continued south along the coast as the three men talked, occasionally looking out the windows at the villages they passed. They flew in silence, the tribes' people mumbling in their dialect looking at the ocean below.

The pilot started his slow descent fifteen minutes later into *Nha Trang* coming in from the East through the islands about ten kilometers offshore. They approached the coastline again heading towards the old American airbase and now civilian airport.

The pilot turned and said, "The minibus is waiting at the hanger. I've arranged for us to park in one of the old military Quonset hangers near the civilian airport. It will take us about one hour to button this plane down and refuel," he said before returning to talk with the control tower about making the final approach.

"That's okay. We'll send the minibus bus back for you in one hour. We're going shopping at the market in town with the boys back there. Join us there and watch the fun. I would get rid of your uniform, though," he said laughing and watching the excitement behind them as the ground came closer to the jet.

Hands were gripping seats and anything else to support the ethnic guys. They looked around, not knowing what to expect, as *Quan* shouted orders at them. The ground moved up faster and gripped the tires of the small craft as the men started shouting at each other and laughing. They were on earth again, and the fear of flying was over.

THE GROUP CLIMBED INTO THE MINIBUS, the gear stored and locked into the storage area. No chances were to be taken with the hill's people who were visiting a big city for the first time for most of them. As the little bus pulled out on the main street heading into *Nha Trang* following the coastline, ten motorcycles pulled along side the bus and the excitement from the ethnic people escalated. Shouts sounded out of the windows as everyone shifted to one side of the bus, each person trying to say something to the bike riders.

"What in the world is going on *Quan*?" shouted the general over the noise in the bus.

"Some friends and family from the highlands who, somehow, knew they were coming. It's all right. They're part of Jon's group, but they live here. Somehow the message got through to them," he explained to the general as he shouted at the people to sit down.

Quan leaned out the window and shouted instructions to the leader of the bikes, telling them where to meet. He waved and pulled ahead of the small bus with the others following closely behind.

An hour later when the minibus returned to the central market with two pilots, there was pandemonium in the crowds. The vendors and shopkeepers were going mad trying to keep loose hands from walking away with merchandise. The ethnic people were running from shop to shop, selecting what they needed and paying half what was asked by the shop owners. That was when the arguments started.

Quan and *Thrang* rushed around from shop to shop sorting out the arguments, the ethnic people walking away with a negotiated half price. *Quan* and *Thrang* were paying the difference after the hill people zeroed in on another shop. The word was passed quickly through the markets that these people had money, negotiate a price and give the little people the goods. And then renegotiate a higher price with the foreigner Vietnamese. Everyone would be happier, but don't make waves. Messages were passed ahead as the group of *Montagnards* roamed the market. They found clothing that they wanted and stripped off their old clothes, and tried on the new ones.

Foreign tourists stood back and watched in amazement as naked little men discarded clothes they didn't want and tried others. The crowds gathered at a distance and watched, as the men looked at each other in new clothes. Then they were off to the next shop for other items.

Alexander Sloan followed them around, amused at the scene and enjoying the shopping trip more than the participants. The money is spent for a good purpose on these guys, he thought, as he walked around looking at the crowds and the happy *Montagnards*.

Thrang disappeared to the bank again and came back with a new supply of Dong for the mad mountain ethnic people.

Quan walked behind them, haggling over prices on new items with excited shop owners. Then he realized that the *Montagnards* had started buying things that they were familiar with. Articles that they could easily convert to weapons. He walked up to Sloan

"Do you know what these guys have started doing?" he asked excitedly as he turned to watch them and looked at the items being thrown into a pile and guarded by a small group of *Montagnards*.

"I give up. Perhaps you can tell me," Sloan said smiling at the excitement in the small group as new items were tossed in.

Quan threw up his hands shouting at the men in their dialect and turned to Sloan saying quickly.

"The little twits are buying things to convert to weapons, their type of weapons. These guys mean business about protecting us." He smiled at Sloan's expression and walked quickly over to negotiate with the astonished shop owners.

Sloan laughed and said to *Thrang*, who came over to him, "You had better organize an extra car to carry all this gear, as he turned to see the pilots walking up to him with their arms loaded.

"Make that two cars," he added.

EIGHT

JONATHAN LANGSTON'S RUSHED TRIP TO BANGKOK and Cambodia was a success. The people he needed to see were friends from the old days as well as the custodian of the foundation's money being siphoned off from the drug cartels and the suppliers of the raw drugs. The bankers were happy about the arrangements with the foundation. They kept half of the money; half of that went to the foundation and the cartel; and suppliers were left with fifty percent of the original amount in the accounts. And they couldn't do a thing about losing their illegal money. The banks were honestly trying to help them sort out the mystery of why half of their money kept disappearing. The governments were happy since the banks gave them half of their share.

Obstacles arose for the cartel and suppliers. The cartel distributors needed supplies of the raw drugs; the suppliers needed payment; and the addicts around the world needed their fix. And the friendly bankers were helping them solve the mystery of the missing millions of greenbacks.

Jonathan stood thinking on the steps of the Central Bank building in Saigon. He had just finished a grueling meeting with the central bankers, and they had agreed on a plan to tackle Triangle Bank's Holding operations in Vietnam. Triangle Bank was a joint venture, and it was far larger than he had expected. The venture was investing heavily into companies that had direct links into distribution, ship-

ping, and air transport linkages throughout the world. The investments didn't stop in Vietnam. They linked into Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. What's the strategy behind this group? Jonathan wondered as he walked out to the street. He now knew that the bank's senior executives were a mix of foreigners and several well-known Vietnamese government officials, mainly controlled by the foreigners.

The questions that remained unanswered for Jonathan were would the Central Bank executives stick by their agreement with him, and which one of the executives was on the take from Triangle? Jonathan suspected that someone was leaking information to Triangle from the Central Bank. He had only disclosed parts of the information in the meeting and not the real motivations of the foundation's investigation into the affairs of the joint-venture bank. Nothing had been said about money laundering and the connection to the drug cartels.

He looked around the street for a taxi but saw none close by, so he decided to walk and clear his mind. He puzzled over the pieces of information that kept coming to the surface of his mind. Triangle had hundreds of millions of dollars in deposits from foreign companies that had no reason to have deposits in Vietnam, except for investments. And Triangle was investing those funds on their behalf into selected industries. But why, he kept asking himself, as he walked. And who controls these companies that deposits money into Vietnam at low interest rates?

Jonathan turned the corner and walked down Nguyen Hue Street towards the Mekong River, an area he remembered well before the fall of Saigon in 1975. He walked past some areas that hadn't changed much; the buildings were older, but there was still with a lot of history behind them from the French Colonial days.

He walked by the small restaurant on the side street where he had met the general on that last hour before they fled Saigon. The war was over, and there was no reason for them to stick around. The old small building was still standing but turned into an art gallery; the restaurant was long gone with the owners after the North took occupation.

Jonathan was in no hurry now. He turned another corner to head back to the center of the city towards the old Opera House, which was

still boarded up from damages from the war days. Vietnam was starting to put the bite on foreign organizations to chip in money to restore these old historic monuments. The French, Americans and the United Nations usually came to the party with money but conditions were usually attached. The people needed to benefit from the donations of cash grants.

The streets were crowded. People rushed to their destinations, the street hawkers intercepted their victims and hassled them to buy post-cards or any item that they could sell. The tourists were most affected, as they became angrier at the constant haggling and pursuit of the street vendors. Nothing was sacrosanct as the tourists ducked into shops hoping to escape, but instead, they found a new group of vendors at the exit doors as the buying and selling continued.

Jonathan stood on a corner near the Opera House watching, feeling good about returning to Saigon, a city that he grew up in and had left a lot of good friends behind. Where are they now? he wondered.

As he walked along the streets, he noticed that the old street names had been changed by the masters of the North, putting familiar names of revolutionary victors in a hope of changing the attitudes of the South. But the South Vietnamese ignored the northern master's intent and went about their business determined to survive in their country that had been reduced to poverty by the incompetence of the northern leaders. Corruption was rampant, and the party members demanded payments to get things done.

The tropical heat was the same as years ago, the humidity level bouncing up a notch or two. He looked at the sky and saw the clouds rolling in from the South. It would soon be raining, the normal afternoon downpour to boost the humidity levels.

Jon turned quickly to look at a group of tourists on the other side of the street. Something or someone caught his attention. He was being watched. Two Vietnamese dressed casually were staring at him when he turned quickly. They faced the opposite direction too quickly, pretending to be interested in something else, but glancing back. Amateurs he thought, deciding to see how good they were. He

remembered the streets, the shortcuts, and the huge Chinese markets not far away.

Jonathan turned and walked quickly to the end of the street, turned the corner, and stopped. He looked back quickly and there they were, running across the street, dodging the speeding motorbikes. He smiled and started a slow trot down the street and across the plaza in front of the old Rex Hotel, originally built by the French and left abandoned for a few years. It had since been restored and was losing money fast he was told, as it was government-owned and mismanaged. Nothing owned and operated by the government made profits, he had been told. And the government-owned banks were directed by the northern masters to continue lending money to unprofitable government-owned companies in order to prop them up to look good to the outside world.

He walked faster as he reached the sidewalk in front of the hotel, looking back to see if they were still following. They were still there. He paced himself, enjoying the excitement again, the memories going back to his escape in 1975 along the same streets before he met *Tuyet* and saved her life and the lives of her guardians.

He passed the restaurant owned by his girlfriend's parents. He thought of *Lan*'s family who died in a bomb blast because they had helped him. He wanted to find the killers in those days, but it was too late, and he needed to get out of Saigon quickly. Too much was at risk with the creation of the foundation's plans, so he had let their memories stay with him all those years.

He didn't know where to start, and he wondered if it was necessary to find the killers. As he ran into the small street leading to the market ahead, he looked back as he rounded the corner to see one of the men with a cell phone to his lips as he ran. He dashed into the small street and slowed. At the end of the street leading to the market, a black sedan stopped quickly, the doors flew open, and three men jumped out heading in his direction. One man had his hand under his waist length coat. Businessmen out for shopping, except they didn't belong there. The two Vietnamese and one European walked quickly towards him, a purpose in their mind, ignoring the shops.

Jonathan turned quickly to head back in the same direction, but it was too late. The other two men came around the corner. He side-stepped the shoppers and ran into one of the clothing stores, asking in the local dialect, as he ran, where was the back exit. The owner pointed a finger and attended the customer as Jonathan disappeared through a partially hidden door.

He ran down a dark corridor through two other doors and into another shop where he asked the same question, and people pointed the direction. As he ran, he reached under his jacket and pulled the .45 automatic, twisting a small cylinder to the barrel, keeping the weapon at his side. Out one shop into another, he slowed when he reached the main street.

He turned to the left and headed back towards the Rex Hotel, glancing back as he ran dodging people and motorcycles when he dashed across the streets. They were not in sight, but for how long, he wondered. He watched the cars as they passed him; no one was interested in the mad westerner running down the street.

Before the hotel, he slowed and walked into one of the galleries to wait and to see if he had lost them. Who are they, he wondered as he stood by the window watching the people pass on the sidewalk. He needed to find out who they were and why they had him under the microscope. He waited ignoring the tourist walking into the gallery.

An elderly couple chatting away with an Australian accent walked into the gallery, admiring the painting from local artists. A stocky man wearing dirty street clothes followed them inside. He carried a backpack in his right hand and glanced briefly at Jonathan as he walked behind the couple. Jon looked quickly at the man with an oversized beard and dirty long hair under a baseball hat and turned his attention to the street. He watched each person passing the gallery and continued his gaze down the street trying to spot any one of the pursuers.

Then he saw the European with one of the Vietnamese walking towards the gallery, walking into each shop and back to the street and continuing. Jon started to turn around to look for the back exit and stopped at the sound of the voice.

"I'm behind you, Jon, watching the same fellas," said the deep familiar voice. He turned slowly, his hand under his jacket, and started laughing softly.

"So what's so funny, Langston?" asked the short man with the dirty beard and long hair.

"You are my friend. I saw you come in, but I didn't recognize you wearing that stupid outfit," he said still chuckling.

"Fancy that, man. That's good to hear that I can walk up behind you when you're being chased by the baddies, and you don't even know it," said the man as he removed his baseball cap, stooping over to pickup his backpack.

"Okay, Geoffrey, you've made your point. Reg said to expect you somewhere in something stupid, but why the baseball hat?"

"It's all part of the little games I like to play. It keeps the boss off balance. Now, let us pick up one of those clowns and terrify them a bit. My choice is the white guy first and then one of the Viets. There are only two visible at the moment. But we need all five of the scum-bags to have real fun."

"And you have a plan, I suppose. I'm fresh out of them at the moment trying to hide my backside in an art gallery, looking at an overgrown dirty beard flapping in my face."

"Yep," he said grinning, as he reached into his pack and removed a revolver. He shoved it into his belt under his shirt and handed the backpack to Jonathan.

Langston looked at the pack and then at the smiling face in front of him.

"And...?"

"You've just stolen my backpack. And you're going to let me chase your ugly face down the street to the other side of the Opera House into the construction site. If I'm not mistaken, your trackers will follow us," Geoffrey Cairns said laughing at the funny side of the chase.

"Are you ready?" he said looking at the two men moving closer on the sidewalk, waiting until they were in front of the gallery.

"Just slam into them hard when you charge out the door with me yelling at your slow ridiculous rump running down the street."

Jonathan started laughing at the ASIO clown as the two men walked in front of the door, then turned to walk in. They glanced at each before walking inside. Jonathan let out a yell and grabbed the backpack and charged between the two unsuspecting men. His shoulders hit them, shoving them against the doorframe as he ran past them. They recovered quickly and started to move when a heavyset man charged into their backs yelling at the fleeing man, knocking the two men to the sidewalk.

The two men jumped to their feet, and looked around seeing the short man charging down the street yelling and chasing a man in a business suit holding a backpack over his head swinging it in slow motion. And the chase was on. The two men started running after them, dodging traffic and pedestrians who watched the mad foreigners chase each other.

Cairns looked back and smiled thinking Come on, suckers. There's another surprise for you ahead. Oh no! I forgot to tell Jonathan, he laughed.

"Oh well, what's another surprise in the same day?" he said aloud as he ran.

Across the plaza, the Vietnamese watched the mad race; two motorbikes collided; and another hit a passing car. Everyone was more interested in the foot race than the traffic. They applauded the short bearded man as he gained on the business suit. Some Vietnamese decided to intercept the other foreign pursuer of the short man by blocking his path, forcing him to detour and lose ground. They laughed and pointed fingers. More bikes collided, trying to avoid the curbs and watching the chase at the same time.

Jonathan ran behind the Opera House and saw the construction site ahead. Not far to go, he thought breathing heavily enjoying the adrenaline shot for the first time in a few days. Has it been that long, he thought, as he ran to the entrance of the site. What's Cairns plan? he wondered, and stopped quickly as he ran around the corner of the site.

"Oh crap," he said aloud. "What's going on?" he said turning around quickly, seeing Cairns charging across the last large intersection, his short legs pumping.

As Langston ran through the gate, he saw ten construction workers standing on the side holding metal bars in their hands. A tall foreigner stared at him and smiled as he slowed down.

He shouted at him.

"Keep running to the other side! We want Geoff inside, followed by the bad guys. Now, get your butt moving. There's no time to waste," he said turning quickly and motioning his men to the inside wall.

Langston ran to the other side of the site just before the highrise building being built. He stopped and looked around, confusion on his face. He was boxed in, no way out. He turned quickly searching for another exit as he pulled the .45 automatic from under his jacket. He ran behind a backhoe, and couched as Cairns charged through the gate at full speed.

Cairns raced to Langston's hiding place, breathing deeply, and laughing.

"What's going on, Geoff?" Jon shouted, watching the entrance as two men ran through, followed closely by three other men. They ran to the center of the site and stopped; guns in their hands. There was a loud clang, and they spun to face the way they came onto the site.

The construction workers were moving in a slow circle around them, the tension in the air as the European slowly started to raise his gun and stopped. The white construction boss was smiling, an automatic pointing at the five men, the other workers walking slowly around them.

"Just drop your weapons and sit on the ground with your hands behind your heads," the boss shouted from under his site helmet.

The European turned to watch the workers as they moved around them, the metal bars moving in motion in their hands. They were preparing for a fight, and he didn't like the odds. He turned to face the construction boss, shouting in a heavy French accent.

"Why are you interfering? We're only after a fugitive who's wanted for a crime. We chased him here, and we want to arrest him."

"Good, so you can show me some papers of who you are and under whose instructions you're following."

They stared at each other, the European deciding the odds, the construction boss watching the man walking up behind the European with his gun drawn.

The European started a slow movement of raising his gun, a decision made, and the risks calculated. The construction boss was smiling and turning the nose of the gun in a slow circle forcing him to follow the movement.

The man, with four Vietnamese companions, spun around when he heard the voice behind them.

"You make one mistake, and it's your last. Now, drop the gun and do as you were told."

The European stared at the dirty beard standing next to the business suit, both men armed and ready to fire, and he was the target. He let the gun fall and stepped back realizing that he had lost the bluff. Nine men converged on the others, grabbing weapons and shoving the men to the ground, a few metal bars tapping sensitive spots when someone was too slow.

Langston walked up to the European and said pointing the gun at the creep's head, "Now we're going to talk. Who are you, and who do you work for?"

"Hang yourself, Langston," were the only words that escaped his mouth as he collapsed when Jonathan's foot found the mark.

Jonathan turned quickly to look at the other men. They stared. The construction boss came over asking quickly.

"What do you want us to do now, Geoff? We can isolate them, but I would think you need more information, particularly from this French clown."

"That's about it. You know where to take them and make it quick. We'll be there shortly. Jon and I have a lot of questions to be answered."

THE FRENCHMAN WAS PANICKED, the pain excruciating as the two ASIO agents did their tricks in asking questions. The four Vietnamese companions sat in terror watching the slow treatment to the Frenchman, realizing that their turn would come. They kept shouting to the Vietnamese with the foreigners that they didn't know anything as their heads kept turning toward the sweating Frenchman.

"Whom are you working for?" Cairns repeatedly shouted. "Tell us now, and get it over with."

Between ragged breaths, the Frenchman kept demanding, "I want to speak with the French Ambassador in Hanoi. You have no right to hold me," he shouted, his eyes darting towards Langston who sat quietly watching, rotating the gun that they had taken from the man at the construction site.

Langston turned and handed the gun to Cairns, and pulled his weapon from its holster strapped to his chest. They were at an old abandoned building on the riverfront; the van was parked close by, ready to leave quickly if necessary.

Langston stood up slowly looking at the man. He slowly started unscrewing the silencer and pulled the slide back on the .45 automatic and let it drive its way home, the metallic noise vibrating through the confined space. The Frenchman's head jerked back as he stared at Langston, the fear in his eyes as the slide was pulled back again and released. The Vietnamese cringed at his side. Langston showed the Frenchman the loaded clip as he inserted it in the handle with a loud clang.

The tall man walked behind the group of men. They tried to turn to follow his movements, but they were bound to the chairs. Cairns stood in front of them with the foreign construction worker, watching Langston walk slowly around them, wondering what his next move would be.

Langston turned quickly behind the Frenchman, placing the automatic next to his head and pulled the slide again, releasing it. The metal slide slammed home. The Frenchman yelled as his eyes followed in slow motion the ejected bullet as it arched its way into the air, falling to the concrete floor and bouncing in front of his feet. He

twisted his head as far as possible to look at the hollow nose pointing at his face.

Jonathan thumbed the hammer back in one quick movement, asking softly, "Who are you working for, and why are you following me?"

The Frenchman tried to move backwards but was restrained. He looked at the man with the dirty beard and shouted.

"Stop this maniac, please!"

"Why should I?" he asked smiling. "He has the gun, and I don't want to interfere. Now, answer his question because I don't think he cares whether you live or die. And be quick about it!"

The Frenchman twisted his head again as Jonathan pulled the slide back again, releasing another bullet in the air; the brass casing bounced and rolled on the concrete floor. Langston stared at the man and spoke roughly.

"I'm tired of this game, Frog. Who are you working for? And this is the last time that I'll ask. After I pull the trigger, we'll dump your body in the river, and that will be the end."

Jonathan walked to the front of the terrified man, and pulled the slide back again, the hammer cocked. He slowly put the gun to the tip of the man's nose, watching his eyeballs follow the movement. He leveled the gun next to the man's head and fired, the explosion vibrated through the building, and then silence.

The Vietnamese sitting closest to him yelled and fainted. The Frenchman tried to say something but lost the words. He started shaking his head violently, his eyes wide in terror, and he shouted, "I... I'll tell you what I know!" as he slumped in his chair against the ropes that were cutting into his hands.

TWO HOURS LATER, CAIRNS AND LANGSTON walked out of the abandoned warehouse heading for a hotel at the other end of Saigon. They wanted distance between them and the men who they left behind, tied up, and missing all their clothing. Their clothes thrown into the river to be picked up by the river people, if they were lucky. It would be interesting and embarrassing for them when some-

Leaving It Behind

one found them naked. They were hired guns of a bureaucrat who had called for Langston's capture and death. The bureaucrat knew Langston and wanted to eliminate the man who was interfering. The motivating factor was that Jonathan Langston knew too much about their plans and his capture was ordered. He was to be isolated and tortured for that information and then killed.

But the Frenchman had no name for the man who gave the orders. He only spoke to a voice over the phone that gave instructions to go to certain restaurants to pickup messages and envelopes full of green-backs as payment. The Frenchman had done a lot of work for the muffled voice over the phone, but he had never met the man. He was only a hired soldier and did the work anonymously, and for a price.

The Vietnamese had never worked with him before. They had been recruited by the invisible voice. He had objected having the Vietnamese with him, but the voice was firm and left no doubt that they were part of the plans for Langston.

The voice had an American accent, which was clear said the Frenchman. But he knew nothing more. His deal had always been, receive instructions, do the deal, and be paid well for silence. And leave the country quickly until he was called again. The Frenchman was a hired killer.

As they walked, Cairns started laughing.

"What is so funny?" asked Jon as they crossed the street dodging the motorcycles.

"I called some friends at the newspapers to go to the warehouse and take photos of our friends in the nude. I gave them a story of drug dealing, gang rivalry on an international scale and hinted at a French connection. And all that type of rubbish. They'll have fun with this one, snapping photos of the bad guys sitting in a circle facing each other in the nude with their guns piled on the floor in the center. My colleague has removed the firing pins," Cairns said, laughing and enjoying the practical joke.

Cairns became serious as he spoke, the clown disappearing, his attitude changing abruptly.

"Jon, I told my newspaper friend that the Frenchman has named an organization and the leader. We may not get any reaction, and then again everything could blow up."

"Geoff, call your friend and tell him that Triangle Bank was mentioned and is under investigation for financing the drug dealers. Tell them that information came from an anonymous source. Let them draw their own conclusion as journalists can do and see what comes out of the woodpile," Jonathan instructed as they walked into the hotel lobby.

Cairns walked over to a chair and dialed a number and spoke briefly, watching Jon who was on his cell phone talking to *Nha Trang*.

THE TWO MEN SAT AND TALKED for a long time making plans for the next phase. It had to be a joint effort between governments. The general had confirmed that the President had pulled in all the bankers from the East Coast and West Coast banks on Sunday morning instead of the original plan, and they were screaming their heads off, denying any knowledge of money laundering.

That was until the President and the Secret Service produced evidence and copies of a few signatures authorizing illegal transfers of money into tax havens for the mob. They denied everything and screamed as they were arrested. Then the White House made a public disclosure of the bank's deliberate involvement in laundering money for the underworld dealing in drugs, pushing death to the children of the nation.

Stock prices will take a beating on the Monday morning after the news hit the circuits. Investors will probably start selling their holdings in bank stock. Middle American society would, no doubt, start withdrawing their savings from banks and investing in U.S. Treasury bonds for safety. Banks were no longer a safe place if they were actively involved in illegal activities. The President came on the nationwide late news as people prepared for bed, announcing that the East Coast and West Coast banks were the only two banks involved.

Leaving It Behind

But he had ordered the regulatory agencies to do a full and immediate investigation on all banks for the American people.

The two banks involved in this scam would be forced to merge into other banks, he stated. "Banks can not subvert the laws, and they are there for the trust of their customers," he said emphatically at the end of the news conference, anger spilling from his voice over the airwaves.

Cairns sat back listening to the news from the States, surprised at how quickly things were moving. He looked at Jonathan and smiled as he said, "You have one pissed off President over there. I'm happy to be with you and this general. I hope to meet him one day."

"You will. But how did you find me in Saigon? I told no one where I was heading, not even Reginald," he asked watching the grin behind the dirty beard.

"You were never too far from me. We also had some other guys following you. You need protection, invisible eyes as you set up your plans to flush out the leaders behind this thing. The only time we lost you was when you went into the central bank here. We couldn't go in, so we waited, hoping that you would reappear. And you did, and the rest you know."

"I'm glad you showed up when you did. I wanted to grab one of them, particularly the Frenchman to find out why they were interested in me. But you showed up in that outfit and scared the crap out of me," he said laughing as Cairns removed the beard and long wig, laughing with Jonathan.

They were the only customers in the small coffee shop in the hotel, and the staff was too preoccupied with watching the soccer match on the television in the corner. Geoffrey answered his mobile and listened.

When he spoke, he turned to Jon smiling and said into the instrument, "You can write that the combined intelligence agencies are tracking the leaders of the drug cartel in the Golden Triangle. We suspect that they're tied in with former CIA Agents who are still operating in the countries outside their government's knowledge, but don't quote anything official," he said listening.

He turned to face Jon covering the phone and asking quickly, "Do you want to say anything about the American involvement in this scam or about what happened in the States this morning?"

"Absolutely not. The general and I are to be kept out of any discussion. Let them pick up the news in the States and draw their own conclusions. But nothing, absolutely nothing is to be said about us even being here," he said angrily, his eyes turning cold as he hissed the last words.

Cairns turned and spoke a few words to end the conversation. "You're not to call me again. If you need any more info, call your home base," he said disconnecting and turning to Jonathan, who was standing up, prepared to walk out.

"Jon, I'm sorry. The guy's an old friend who we used many times to cultivate our own leads and sources. He can be trusted."

Jonathan turned and looked at him coldly; the stare sent chills through Geoffrey. He knew that he had stepped out of line with the man.

"Geoff, you may trust him, but I don't. I don't like journalists, and they will drop you in the soup for another story. If you're hanging with him, I'm out of here, and you're on your own on this case. Have I made myself understood so far? There's too much at risk and more than we've told you. Al Sloan may be able to pick up a phone and speak to the President any time he wishes, but we're working outside official channels. If something goes wrong that exposes us or creates a political incident, the President will deny any knowledge of us."

"Okay, you've made your point, and I'm sorry. I was using my sources to get quick results."

"Then don't do us any favors with your type of contacts. We don't need them, and they're too dangerous. One more time that it happens, and you're out. And I'll pull the trigger myself," he said emphatically, as he threw a 50,000 Dong note on the table and walked out the door leaving the startled ASIO agent behind putting on his beard.

Geoffrey stood up and looked into the ever-present mirror on the wall and adjusted his wig, then walked quickly out the door. He looked down the street and saw Jonathan crossing at the intersection.

He raced after him, realizing the severity of his mistake with this man. What ticked him off really? he wondered, as he walked up to Jon as he reached the corner.

"Jon, are we still working together?"

"We are, but stop being the clown and giving info that's not necessary. People's lives are in jeopardy now, and you're perpetuating that risk by talking with them. The journalists are out of this caper. They'll bug you to death for a story," he said stopping to look at Cairns as his cell phone rang.

He listened for a few moments and shouted at the caller before disconnecting.

"I told you not to phone me, you idiot! You'll receive no further leads from me! Look, everything I told you before was a lie just to get you off my back, so get lost, will you?" he yelled, turning to look at a grinning Langston.

Angrily, Cairns said, "So, what are you grinning about, you freak? So, I was wrong. After all these years of doing this thankless work I goofed up. Now get off my back," he spat while walking down the street shaking his head.

Langston watched the short man and smiled. "You'll do okay," he said softly, "now that you've learned a lesson. Five minutes ago, you were a liability. Now it's time that you become an asset," he said picking up his pace to catch up with the angry man.

"Geoffrey," he said as he caught up with him. "We do need to work together, but there are some things that I can't tell you at the moment because I simply don't know what position we're in. Now, if you'll stop and settle down, we can get back to work--together."

Cairns stopped and turned to stare at the taller man, and smiled sheepishly. He said slowly as he looked around regaining control over his anger, "Okay, what's ahead of us?"

"I really don't know. I'll be leaving for *Nha Trang* tomorrow afternoon, as there are some things that I need to do there, to make amends for my past," he explained watching the questioning expression on Cairns' face.

When Jon continued speaking, they both knew instinctively that they were heading in the right direction in finding the controller of the banks and the cartel leader.

"Find out all you can about that man, Geoffrey," he said handing him a business card. "I'll give you a few names and leads. Use your own resources, but stay away from the journalists. That man is powerful, and I need to know how he fits in with this government. The business card has one name and position, but it's not who he really is or what he does. He's someone else, and he was invited to that meeting this morning at the Central Bank. The card's a fake. The man's a fake, and we need to know who he is."

"Why are you so sure that he's a fake? I know the name, and he does work for the government and holds a high position."

"Because, Geoff, of his reaction and then cover-up as if he had no interest when I mentioned our suspicions about Triangle Bank. And the man's not a true Vietnamese. He's a transplant. Who is he Geoff? We need to know as much about him as we can get in a short period of time."

"Why do you say he's not Vietnamese? He's a key top official and a party spokesman. He just also happens to be a Deputy Governor of the Central Bank. That guy has power, and he's not going to abuse it. I don't understand where you're coming from," Cairns said as Langston turned and walked down the street in the other direction, and stopped to wait for the ASIO strategist.

"Because he tripped himself up several times when he spoke English, and he knows Bernier. I mentioned a French banker in Sydney who was a conduit to the illegal laundering of Triangle, and his eyes went closed, as if concentrating. He knows Bernier, and I'll bet you that he knows those two executives of Triangle Bank in Sydney. Any news on them yet?" he asked as he looked at the quizzical expression on Cairns' face.

"Not yet, but I'll call Reginald in a few moments. McCord was to pick them up this morning for questioning. The other two bankers, Pearson and White, are being held indefinitely, and they will go on trial for criminal charges. They've traced huge amounts of money

going through their banks to Triangle Bank, the only branch outside of Sydney. And there is no reason for Triangle to have a branch there, except for laundering. They don't lend money to farmers."

"Where's the branch?"

"In Wagga New South Wales, and..."

"In the center of the mob's drug distribution center in Australia controlled by the crime bosses," Langston finished for Geoffrey.

"Yes, and you know all about it?" Cairns asked alarm in his voice.

"Yes, it's controlled by Robert Campelli, who we've been watching for years. We tapped into his bank accounts in Asia a few years ago which he set up to pay the drug suppliers. And we pissed him off when half his money disappeared, and he still doesn't know how," Jonathan said chuckling, remembering the exercise that he and his Laotian banker friends had devised, and continued, explaining the story.

"For a long time, he blamed the New York mob for double-dealing but eventually he worked out a compromise. We think that's when Triangle Bank came into the picture. Originally, Triangle came out of Hong Kong and started spreading to other major financial centers. It was not interested in lending money. It was an investment bank operating on behalf of wealthy clients. Now we know who most of those clients are. They started working slowly through the bigger banks until they had found willing participants in the laundering schemes at the executive levels. Men who would take secret payments in a tax haven to expedite the flow of money and who could keep their mouths shut. Triangle expanded its laundering operations by coercing a few of the major international banks. There are six that we know about now, but there may be others. We don't know. That's why we're hitting the six big banks hard first and making it public, like this morning."

"Okay so you know about Campelli, and probably more than the agency, but why do you say that *Tiep*," pointing to the business card, "is not Vietnamese, when he holds such a power position?"

"It's simple. He speaks English with an American accent. He didn't pick up that accent in Vietnam and not in the North where he's

from. Come on, we have work to do, and you need to find out about those two guys in Sydney who were picked up this morning."

NINE

JONATHAN LANGSTON LEFT A STARTLED Geoffrey Cairns standing alone on the sidewalk, confused with the news about the American accent. They had agreed to meet later that evening for a meal and exchange information. Jonathan needed to see someone quickly from the old days, a man who had extraordinary contacts and who knew most of the secrets buried away in the cupboards of Saigon. He was in a hurry to leave for *Nha Trang*, but he had to finish things in Saigon first. He wanted to see *Tuyet*, to be with her, and to talk with her. He missed those days of years ago when they wandered around the countryside and talked together. Laughter had been part of them; they shared without criticism and had a deep understanding of each other's needs and feelings.

The memory of the old woman from the village had been surfacing frequently in his mind lately. She had said without reservation that he and *Tuyet* were tied together for life. That was their destiny, and it could no longer be denied. He missed her, and he wanted her with him. He had been miserable when *Tuyet* married Marc Lavoie, but he had kept his silence, realizing that he had waited too long, and his work was too important, or so he thought.

"I need you, *Tuyet*," he said to himself. "More than you'll ever realize, and I will not let you go this time. The old lady was right. We are destined for each other, and I was the fool for waiting. Please

hang in there, and wait for me. When this thing is over, I'm out. I no longer want to be involved. Let the general find someone else to do his dirty work."

Jonathan saw the shop two blocks ahead on Dong Khai, parallel to Hai Ba Trung and Pho Nguyen Hue. An ancient souvenir shop of items collected over the years by a man who was more ancient than the items he sold. He must be in his eighties, Jon thought.

Will he remember me after all these years? He wondered. The last time they were together was two days before the fall of Saigon and his escape up the river after agreeing with the general to a plan that changed the course of their lives. This man had been part of those plans; the ideas had been refined between the young man and the sixty-year-old Vietnamese, who was a master at the game of deception. Part French and part Vietnamese, he had learned the rules of deception from the masters of France as a young man.

Tong had become disillusioned with the South, the North, and the Americans. No one could be trusted as he saw his country in the South crumble through the corruption of its leaders. He knew that the South would fall. It had to fall as the Americans had made that decision when it pulled out two years earlier, leaving little hope for the people.

The old man had told Jonathan on their last day together, "You must leave soon, my young friend. Meet Sloan and agree to the plans to destroy the drug pushers, or it will destroy our young people like it killed your brother. It will take you and the general years to make the plan work effectively, but you will be able to do it. You both have determination, and I wish that I could be with you. But I'm too old, and I must stay here to protect my family. You'll always be able to contact me at this address and number, but use it wisely when you try. Use the codes that only we know."

Jonathan had carried that small piece of paper in his wallet for years, never daring to lose it for fear of losing contact with *Tong*. And now they would see each other again and talk after twenty years. This man was unknown to the intelligence agencies. He had said nothing about *Tong* for years, not until he fully trusted Sloan. He had often

spoken to *Tuyet* about *Tong*, and she had understood the relationship between the two men.

Jonathan wanted *Tuyet* to meet this extraordinary man. And she would when it was safe for them to be together. He could not risk any danger to *Tong* or to *Tuyet*. He owed them that.

Jon needed to follow a sequence that he had agreed with *Tong* earlier that afternoon when he contacted him with the codes. The old man's surprise when he heard Jon's voice was genuine after twenty years, and his affection for the young man hadn't changed.

He was excited when he heard Jon's voice, but he became concerned when Jon told him that they needed to meet in secrecy, and it involved the original plan that they had refined together.

The old man waited in silence as Jon spoke on the phone, and finally interrupted the conversation by saying quickly, "Jon, this is serious business, and it's time for your final move for your brother's memories. I will help, as you know, but we must be careful. They no longer watch me as they no longer fear me, but caution is needed. Now, this is how we must make contact."

Jonathan walked slowly down the street, avoiding the vendors and the night girls who walked up to him, asking if he wanted a good time for the night. He walked past them, ignoring their comments and continual bargaining until they gave up hope. He wasn't interest in them, and said several times, "go find someone else," in their language.

Across the street, he saw what he was looking for. The small alleyway next to the antique shop where he needed to meet someone first. An old lady selling paintings and cigarettes. Where is she? he wondered, as he walked slowly along the sidewalk. Had he misunderstood *Tong*? He started to doubt himself, looking around continually. There were many people on the sidewalk of different ages but not the woman that *Tong* had described to him. An old woman wearing ragged street clothes in an old gray hat was to meet him.

His anxiety level started to climb as he looked around hoping that he was in the right area. The description by *Tong* was accurate; the alleyway was across from him next to the shop, but not the contact. And without that contact, he wouldn't be able to find *Tong*. He started

to walk down the block again, dodging the girls wearing the short dresses with too much lipstick smeared on their mouths. They were guaranteeing pleasures beyond a man's imagination for a few dollars, and a big dose of clap, Jon mused, as he walked to the next corner.

"I can't hang around here too long or the girls will pester me to death convinced that I'm looking for one of them at a bargain price," he said aloud, turning to face the alleyway halfway down the block.

He saw something and started walking in that direction. An old lady wearing a gray hat had walked out of the alley and was slowly placing paintings on the sidewalk as Jon walked up to her, asking gently unable to see her face clearly from under the hat.

"Excuse me, Elder Sister, but do you have any etchings of *Thrang Van To*?"

She smiled up at the young man who had spoken politely, nodded her head, and spoke pleasantly with teeth that were perfectly white, in fact, in mint condition, making Jon wonder if they were her originals.

"I do have several *Thrang Van To* etchings but not with me. They're old and should be thrown in the garbage, but I keep hoping to find a buyer someday. If you could wait for a moment, I'll go find them in my room at the back of the alley," she said as she turned to walk quickly down the darkened alley.

Jonathan watched her agile moments as she rushed down the narrow passageway, wondering how old she really was to be able to move so quickly. He turned swiftly as a motorbike pulled up on the sidewalk, and stopped the engine racing. His hand was under his jacket, prepared to move. One of the Honda girls jumped off the back of the bike and walked towards him, swaying her butt in the short leather skirt smiling.

"Do you want a good time, Joe?" she asked smiling, a few teeth missing.

"Not tonight, and you don't need my watch if that's what you trying to steal. I'm waiting on a friend so get out of here!" he shouted the last few words in her language, as the old lady appeared from the darkened alley shouting abuse at the girl. She turned quickly and fled to the Honda, as her companion gunned the engine, and the bike

jumped the curb onto the street almost losing the girl clinging on the back.

"I'm so sorry, but I couldn't find the Tos. They're at a friend's place. Would you follow me, and we'll go find them?" she pleaded quickly, picking up the other paintings and walking down the sidewalk away from the alleyway. Jon watched her as she walked away without saying another word. She turned her head and motioned him to follow, as another motorbike pulled up with one girl clinging to the handlebars.

"No thanks!" he shouted before the prostitute could say anything. He turned quickly to follow the old lady who had disappeared around the corner into the next street.

As he turned the corner, he looked down the narrow street, and she had disappeared, nowhere in sight.

"Blast it!" he said and started to run, hoping that she had turned into an alleyway. There were a few small houses along the street, but the doors were shut as he ran down the street looking at each possibility. He passed a door that was slightly open, and music could be heard flowing from the recesses of the door. Music that was familiar, but he couldn't place it.

He slowed and looked around. The music volume was raised, and he smiled turning to look at the bluish door and walked in quickly. The lights were dim, and the old lady smiled at him and motioned him to come in. He closed the door gently and walked down a long hallway into a huge living room at the back. A pleasant little garden was off to the side on the terrace. He walked into the middle of the large room, pleasantly decorated with antique Vietnamese furniture that collectors would pay a fortune to acquire. He looked around the room as an elderly man walked in from a door on the other side of the room. They stared at each other, and the years peeled away for the two friends.

"Well, don't just stand there like a dummy," *Tong* said chuckling, looking at the expression on Jonathan's face.

Jon walked over to the older man, and shook his extended hand with both hands, in the Vietnamese tradition of respect. And *Tong*

looked up him and smiled, his age apparent, but his eyes sparkled with the joy of seeing his young friend again. He reached up and embraced Jonathan, both sharing the moment of respect that they had for each other. *Tong* looked over after a moment and spoke quickly.

"Come, let us have some tea together and talk. We have about twenty years to catch up on, and you look so well. A little heavier, but you look so healthy. Life has been kind to you, my dear young friend."

"And you look well also, my Elder Brother. A little older like both of us, but your health speaks well for your age. But..." the younger man started smiling, "But why the long hair and white beard? It goes well with you, but you look so different."

Tong started laughing and motioned Jon to take a seat. He moved quickly, far quicker than most men twenty years younger, as he pulled several chairs close to a small table overlooking the small garden. He was a small man as most Vietnamese of his age, but he still had his agility and quick responses. His mind was active which made Jon relax more, realizing that he had made the right decision to call his mentor of the war days.

"*Hien*," he shouted into the alcove. "Please bring us some tea and some of Jon's favorite cakes," he added turning to face the young man.

"Well Jonathan, what brings you back to Saigon after all these years? I always knew that you would return when it was safe and when you could. You always belonged here with our people. I have something to tell you shortly about the people who ordered the death of *Lan* and her family," he said watching the pained expression on Jon's face as the memories came back, the hopelessness of the situation he was in at that time.

"Tell me later when you're ready, but I need your advice tonight, and your help if it's possible," he said stopping to look around as *Hien* came in smiling and carrying a tray of cakes and tea. She placed the tray on the table and served the two men, before she spoke to the young man.

"You don't know happy you made *Tong* today when you called. He has been an excited little boy all afternoon, constantly looking at his watch and insisting that I have that music ready for you and threatened me with death if I didn't meet you on time."

"That's okay, Elder Sister. I had the same feelings this afternoon after I phoned him. Something has happened, and I need his advice, his help. He's the only person I can trust here and the only person who knows the original story. I'll probably need him to go with me to *Nha Trang* to meet someone, and you can also come to protect him from the beach girls if you want," Jon said watching the expression on *Tong's* grinning face.

"Beach girls. Come on, Jonathan. All he can do is watch and fantasize these days and remember the days when you two were chasing the young ones of your age. He thinks that I didn't know, but I did, the wicked old man, and I'm still with him after all these years. And I still enjoy his company and his wicked sense of humor. Yes, we'll come, won't we *Tong*?"

Hien left the room laughing without giving *Tong* a chance to answer.

Tong looked at the young man, smiled, and reached over to touch his arm.

"Jonathan, before we talk, tell me, is Alexander at *Nha Trang*?"

"Yes, he's there with *Quan* and his family."

"Good, I need to see Alexander again. And is *Tuyet* there?"

Jonathan's smile disappeared, as he had never realized that *Tong* knew about *Tuyet*. The two men had written each other over the years, but always in guarded tones, never knowing who would intercept letters. Jon's letters were always sent to *Anh Phon* to be delivered to *Tong* and visa versa. Jon smiled realizing the truth was coming out.

"So you crafty devil, you knew about her all these years. And *Anh Phon* was your secret link to me," he said pausing to look at the quizzical expression on *Tong's* face.

"Yes, my dear friend, *Tuyet* is at *Nha Trang*, and I'm going to find her after all these years. I can no longer be without her. I've waited too long, and I've denied my love for her all these years. I almost lost

her once, and I hope it's not too late," he said sadly. "And Alexander knows that I'm quitting after we finish this business. Now we must talk," he said leaning over to pour *Tong* another cup of tea and serving him a slice of cake.

Jon sat back in his seat starting to explain to *Tong* about his concerns and his need for advice when his cell phone rang. He reached into his jacket pocket quickly and pulled out the small box; *Tong* watching in silence. Jon spoke briefly and listened.

He said quickly, "Okay Geoff, I'll meet you at San Lucia on Nguyen Hue in two hours. We'll talk, but try to find out what happened to Frank Tan; trace him if you can. And Neetham didn't commit suicide. He was killed. There's no other answer. Get Sandhurst and McCord working on the answers. We don't have much time, and wear another disguise," he ordered looking at the expression on *Tong's* face as he disconnected and shoved the box in his pocket, a frown appearing on his face.

Tong sat silently, not saying a word while waiting on the young man to absorb the information that he had heard, and *Tong* only understood a part of it, and that was enough for him to worry for the young man. Langston sat back after a few minutes and looked at *Tong*, forcing a smile before he spoke.

"We have big problems, *Tong*."

"I know. I can see that. It must be serious when you're still carrying that favorite weapon of yours under your jacket."

"It is serious, and I need your help more than ever, my dear friend. And I'll have no time on this trip to chase the girls with you, but maybe on another time," Jon said flippantly trying to hide his anxiety.

"I know, but there will always be another time. And to be honest, I would prefer to see you with *Tuyet*. I want to see a grandchild since I adopted you twenty-years ago, you fool," he said laughing throwing the mood in the room into balance the way he always had the ability to do.

Jon reached across and touched his arm, saying tenderly, "*Merci Mon Pere. C'est toute que je demande.*"

Tong stood up and walked to cupboard in the corner of the room. He opened the door and removed several files from a hidden recess.

He walked back and sat down next to the younger man and said, "So Frank Tan, the rogue CIA Agent, has escaped the net again," *Tong* said slowly. "He'll head back here because this is where his power base lies. And Serge Bernier arrived in Saigon on a private jet this morning and is hiding away. Where, I don't know, but we'll find out. I only learned about it this afternoon after your call, and I suspected that you needed information and fast. My people are now working, and they will let me know when they have news. That's why I can't go with you for a few days, but I will come to *Nha Trang* to visit. The action, Jon, is in Saigon. This is where you'll find Tan, Bernier, and your mysterious leader of the cartel manipulating the banks. You'll have to come back here, but you need to see Alexander first. And," as he paused, a wicked grin grew on his face, "you must be sure that *Tuyet* is all right and make sure that your future together is stitched up properly."

"I know, and I have organized protection around them at the villa."

"So I heard. They created a riot in the *Nha Trang* markets when Alexander set them loose on a shopping spree," *Tong* said laughing, stroking his long white beard with his hand.

"What shopping trip?"

"Al will tell you when you get there. They're safe with the *Montagnards*, and God help anyone who gets near anyone at the villa."

Tong sat back in his seat and thought for a moment and opened one of the files.

He looked at Jonathan and said quickly, "You're right. David Neetham didn't commit suicide. The rogue agent, with Tan, knew too much. He was taken out of the action for some reason. We need to know why. Now, let us talk, because you need to meet your ASIO friend soon."

Jon turned his head quickly and looked at his mentor in admiration.

Leaving It Behind

"You miss nothing, do you?"

"Nope. Now let us talk."

TWO HOURS LATER, JONATHAN LANGSTON walked through a concealed door in the back wall of *Tong's* garden, leading into a small alleyway. As Jonathan walked down the long passageway, he thought about the meeting with *Tong* and their talks over the past few hours.

He said his good-byes with a promise to see them in a few days at the villa. They both had things to do. They agreed on a method of contacting each other. It was important that *Tong's* involvement remained protected, and he continued as the hidden eyes and ears for them, they had decided. *Tong's* sources of information far outreached theirs, and they were running out of time.

They had talked about many things, pulling pieces of paper from *Tong's* files, putting together information about the extent of the drug cartel's operations in Southeast Asia. *Tong*, without realizing it, had included information on the cartel's involvement in two banks in Vietnam and one in Cambodia that had never occurred to Jonathan. The tentacles of the cartel reached far into the banking, supply, and distribution networks. Whoever had created the network had put together a totally integrated system that was ingeniously conceived.

During the time they were together, *Tong* received one phone call from a source that was checking out a link into money movements. Jonathan was surprised at the extent of *Tong's* intelligence gathering sources. When the phone rang, Jonathan had looked around for the source of the ring but couldn't find the instrument. *Tong* stood up quickly and walked to the other side of the room and reached behind a bookshelf, opened a hidden door, and listened to the caller, and then spoke rapidly for five-minutes. He finished the conversation and closed the door and looked at Jonathan smiling.

"I have to be careful, after all, and I do have a few sources left in this mad world," he said laughing.

"I suppose you do, but what happens when you have visitors and the thing rings?"

"Simple. There's a recorder and I switch off the bell. There is a small blue light hidden in the corner that tells me someone has tried to make contact," he indicated, pointing to a small blue globe in the corner so small that you had to know what to look for.

"Ingenious, my old friend."

"I think so also. Only a few people have that number and the exchange is in Dalat, so it's untraceable," he said chuckling. "I'll give you the number before you leave, and that's how we talk from now on. That's the reason that I sit in this chair when I have visitors. Only to watch for the blue light and not the red lights like we used to do."

"Clever again. Now what happened?"

"The bank in Cambodia is interesting, and we need to pursue it with the help of your banking contacts there."

"Why?"

"It receives about five million dollars a week which is paid to the suppliers up North."

"Give me the details and I'll call the Governor of the Central Bank who's working with us on this caper, and we'll block the transfers when it hits the Central Bank."

"It will not work that way because they're bypassing the Central Bank."

"What are you talking about *Tong*? They have to go through the Central Bank to transfer money into another bank, unless..."

Tong starting laughing as Jonathan began to see the picture.

"That's right, my boy. They are using couriers to bypass the banking system that you're tapped into so well. Now we have work to do to block this one. Get on the phone to your friends, and we start tonight, just to shake the scumbags up a little. They must have a few million stashed away that we could use," he said laughing and rubbing his hands together.

Jonathan had phoned his friend in the Central Bank of Cambodia and told him what he knew and they agreed to pass on information as they received it.

Jonathan looked at *Tong* and said in anger, "This monster's head keeps changing colors, doesn't it?"

"It does and relax. We have work to do. Now, what about this man you met this afternoon at the Central Bank that's bothering you? What's his name? Tell me about your suspicions!"

Tong sat back and listened as Jonathan explained the meeting at the bank, describing each person present and the reactions of one particular person. His analytical mind was working well for a man of eighty-years-old, and he was enjoying the intrigue and being part of the action again. Jonathan spoke without leaving out any detail or conjecture.

After about twenty minutes, *Tong* sat up quickly and asked, concern written in his voice, 'What was that name again?"

"*Nguyen Thrang Tiep*. Do you recognize the name or know the man?"

"Recognize? Yes. Do I know him? No. And he's one person who I would approach very cautiously. He's from the North and not the South. He's a Deputy Governor of the Central Bank in the North, which controls this southern part. If he was there at short notice, it's because he has a concern. He had a reason to be there in person when you requested the meeting in person of the people here. Who set up the meeting for you? It had to be through political channels."

"Yes, and it was arranged through the Thai Central Bank, and the man has been working with us for years. And we can trust him."

"Yes, I am sure of that because I introduced him to you, and he would have gone through channels and that would have been in the North. Call our friend now, and find out how the contact was set up, and we'll decide which way to go," *Tong* had said with a worried frown on his forehead.

Jonathan called their friend and was told that he had asked his deputy to set up the meeting in the South, and not to contact the North. Jonathan had said thanks to his friend who was furious at his deputy who had not followed instructions. Jonathan told him that it was okay as the situation had advanced quickly because the deputy didn't follow orders, unless there another reason.

Their friend hung up telling them he would ring *Tong's* during the night after speaking with the deputy who was not going to sleep be-

cause he had not followed orders. The Central Bank's security people would be going to the deputy's house after the phone call for an explanation.

Jonathan looked at *Tong* and smiled, saying softly, "Our Thai Governor friend has a traitor as a deputy. It's worked out well for us because *Tiep* surfaced quickly. What we need to find out and quickly is why the deputy turned sour. And that's your job *Tong*, my elder brother, with your circle of devious contacts in the hidden world of intelligence. You were always good at this game, and that's why you survived because you knew too many secrets, and you covered yourself. I have someone to meet shortly," he said as he stood with the older man.

They embraced, and Jonathan said sadly, "We must retire from this business together and enjoy life for a change. I'll call you later tonight, as I know you'll be awake."

"I will be awake and other people will also stay awake tonight. And before we retire, you are to sort your life out, once and for all, with *Tuyet*, my son"

TEN O'CLOCK AT NIGHT was usually not a busy time for customers at San Lucia restaurant on Nguyen Hue. Outside, the sidewalks were crowded every night along the busy street. Most of the shops remained open as long as possible for the late night customers and tourists. The art galleries were doing a good trade from the notorious copy artists. The artists were good at their works of art, and the naïve tourist purchased the genuine paintings at a reasonable price, inflated a little for the gullible tourist with plenty of greenbacks, not realizing that they were buying copies.

But tonight was different as Jonathan walked around the crowded dining room, dimly lighted, looking for Geoffrey Cairns wondering what type of disguise the man wore. So he started looking at all the short men sitting alone or with other people, hoping to pick out his man. The restaurant was crowded, not a vacant seat, unless someone let you share their table, and Jonathan was not in a mood for small

talk. He had too much on his mind, and too many things to do for chitchat. The meal would be a quick one.

He needed information from Cairns. Where is the clown in disguise, he wondered as he made his way between the tables, apologizing to the waiters who had to step around him with load trays. He walked to the back of the restaurant near the exit door and turned slowly to look around.

He glanced up at the paintings hanging on the walls from well-known Vietnamese artists and the famous large copy of the Last Supper, which was far removed from its original. The characters were portrayed as dockworkers in a dimly lit cellar; the main character in the center wore a red beard and a Mexican sombrero.

Jonathan smiled as he admired the artist's impression of Christianity, a little disjointed, but there was a message in the painting, buried somewhere in the middle of the twelve dockworkers around the table.

He turned his head quickly as the headwaiter approached with a piece of paper in his extended hand. Jonathan looked at him, and thanked him. He opened it quickly and read, looking around slowly putting the note in his pocket.

He was being watched, the note had warned and another meeting place was given in thirty minutes. Jonathan continued to look at the paintings on the wall and casually glanced around the restaurant trying to detect a curious or interested look from any of the patrons. He started walking through the restaurant again, concentrating on each person as he walked down the narrow aisle to the entrance. If someone was following him, or interested in him, they would have to follow him out the door fairly soon, he decided, as he opened the door and walked out onto the sidewalk. He glanced around again, looking through the windows, but no one moved to leave. Is Cairns playing another of his games again? he wondered, as he started walking towards the river.

Halfway down the block almost to the road paralleling the river, his cell phone rang. He reached into his pocket, and answered. He listened and turned his head slowly and looked around.

"I see them. Where are you?"

He put the small box into his pocket and walked faster, turning suddenly into a small alleyway before the main road. He ran to the end and stopped before the alley returned to the main street. He moved into the shadows and waited.

A few seconds later, a man stopped at the alley and looked down the lane and turned around quickly, joined by someone else. They held something in their hands, but Jonathan couldn't make out what they had. They ran towards the main street. Jonathan retraced his steps in the shadows toward them in the middle of the trap being set up.

As he reached the corner, he looked around slowly. They had disappeared, vanished. He pulled his automatic and twisted the silencer on the barrel as he waited. Another five minutes, and he would follow them. That would give Cairns and his watchers time enough to move into position. He looked at his watch as he waited, and looked down the alley where he had come from. There they were at the end of the alley heading in his direction, walking against the walls on each side trying to remain concealed.

They were twenty feet inside the alley when Jonathan saw two other figures appear behind them. He looked at his watch again and walked around the corner and ran to the end of the block, turned and waited, his .45 leveled at the alley, ready to fire.

The two men raced out of the alley and turned the corner heading in his direction. They hadn't seen him until they were almost on top of him.

He stepped out and shouted, "Drop them now!"

They slid to a stop; one man started running towards the street when he stopped, stepping back with the steel touching his forehead. He turned but two other men stood behind him. His leg collapsed as a foot jammed it way behind his knee, knocking him to the pavement. The other man yelled in pain, as a metal rod slammed against his ribs, the bones shattering as he bent over in pain, going down on his knees.

Cairns came walking out of the alley and walked up to the two men and smiled at Jonathan from his dirty beard. "All right, I like the dirty thing," he said laughing at the expression Jonathan's face. "Good

show back there. You had them off balance. Let's get these two characters out of here and go somewhere to talk quietly if that's possible. There's a few things that you need to know and quickly. You're on somebody's hit list, and it's getting shorter. These guys were freighted in from New York to hit you. My man over there will do the interrogation, but they'll regret coming to Saigon."

"Whom do they work for?" Jonathan asked nodding his head towards the two foreigners on the pavement.

"We can only guess at this point, and that's what we need to talk about. Joseph will take care of them," he indicated pointing at the tall construction worker he had seen that afternoon, and who had nothing to do with building anything.

"All right! Let's get out of here. I need to make a few phone calls soon and get some other things moving."

"HOW IN THE NAME OF GOD, OUR FATHER, did you get a gun into this country?" shouted Cairns across the table on the second floor of the restaurant where they were the only customers.

The Wild Horse Saloon was famous for its steaks and owned by an American and his Vietnamese wife who were downstairs preparing their meals. They were assured privacy, and Cairns was a frequent visitor to the restaurant each time he was in Saigon.

"I have my ways," Langston said looking at the man curiously.

"You have your ways, and that's all you can say."

"Yes, that's all I will say."

"I have to use the diplomatic pouch to get weapons into any country, and you have been walking around all this time with that .45 strapped to your chest. How?" shouted Cairns.

Langston looked around and smiled, placing his index finger to his mouth before speaking softly.

"It's a secret, but don't tell anyone. Now, what happened that's so important, and I'll tell you what I can," he said, amusing himself with Cairns.

Cairns looked around, feeling the tension ease after his outburst. He looked at Jonathan, as he wiped his paw over his beard.

"David Neetham was killed, but it was done to look like suicide."

"How do you know?"

"He had the gun in his left hand, and he's a right-hander. The bullet went in straight and not at an upward angle, if he had pulled the trigger himself. Also, he was behind the wheel, so he must have been driving. Whoever shot him was with him, and they knew each other. NCA is finger printing and investigating now."

"Okay, so far, but who would have done it?"

"We're still checking on all angles, but it appears that he was tipped off and eliminated as a risk to whatever they're involved with. Frank Tan disappeared before McCord could pick him up on Monday morning. McCord's people were not fast enough, and they're investigating every angle."

"When and where was he shot?" asked Jonathan leaning closer, remembering a conversation in Sandhurst's office when McCord made a comment about Fred Wakely.

"Early Sunday night in the mountains two hours from Sydney. That's all we know. The local police found him, and no notes were found. Why? What's bothering you?"

"The comment made by McCord that Wakely had contacted them. Has Sandhurst listened to those tapes yet?"

"I'm not sure, but I'll wake Reginald soon and find out. Now, what's up on your side because we have a few complications to deal with. And that's including your refusal to tell me how you got your gun here so easily."

Jonathan smiled at the ASIO Agent and decided to let him stay curious. He waited until the young Vietnamese waitress served their dinner and started talking slowly to make sure that his thinking was heading in the right direction. He told Cairns about his meeting with an old friend, but not specifically who the friend was. Cairns didn't push, and they talked until the American owner came up to check on them.

They decided it was time to leave and paid, walking down the steps heading for the door.

Jonathan turned to Cairns and said, "Come, I'll show you a part of this city that you don't know about, and then you can go to your hotel. We both have more work to do tonight. And you need to get us more information on Tan and Neetham. By the way," he said slowly looking at the Australian from ASIO, the man with a quick mind hidden behind the clown, which disguised his real intentions. "Serge Bernier flew into Saigon this afternoon on a private jet. We need to find him, so pull out all yours little tricks."

Jonathan walked down the steps and hailed a taxi at the corner. He looked around and saw Cairns on his cell phone, issuing orders as fast as his beard would allow.

He ran down the steps after Langston and jumped into the taxi.

"Where are we going?"

"To the red light district."

"But we are in the red light district," he shouted, looking at a smiling Langston.

"I know. But the other one is better, and we need to see some people there," he said to the driver in Vietnamese, while smiling at Geoffrey Cairns.

The driver smiled as Jonathan gave him a bundle of money. He looked at it quickly and sped away, tooting his horn that was a habit, even though there was little traffic on the streets at this time of night. "He needs to warn the motorbikes, the odd car, and the pedestrians who walk across the streets without looking. He's telling them that he's coming through," Jon mused with Geoff.

The man drove dodging the odd pedestrian and the bikes, and continued through red traffic lights as if they didn't exist.

"In this city, traffic rules are made to be broken," Jon said looking out the window of the speeding car. They sat back in the seat and looked the other way, ignoring the activity on the outside of the car.

The taxi rounded a corner in one of the older sections of Saigon that had deteriorated from the war days.

"This area was a hive of activity during the early 70s," Jon said as the taxi skidded to a stop.

"Where are we going?" Cairns asked climbing out of the cab.

"To take a ride a short distance on those two cyclos up ahead," he said, speaking in Vietnamese as he turned to the taxi driver.

The driver nodded his head.

"Where did you learn such good Vietnamese?" Cairns asked with a bemused expression.

"From your mother during the war," Jon responded quickly, as they walked down the street laughing. The taxi sped away as they stepped into the cyclos, and Jon gave directions.

The three-wheeled bicycle with a seat for the passenger suspended between the front two wheels is called a cyclo, and it is nerve-racking for a passenger sitting in front as the driver paddles his way down the streets during heavy traffic, dodging traffic, ignoring all the rules.

They rode around the partially deserted streets for thirty minutes in the cyclos. Jon was continually talking with the cyclo boys. They returned to the same spot where they were picked up. Cairns had remained silent during the trip, wondering what was going on as Langston chatted and laughed with the Vietnamese. They stopped, and he motioned Geoffrey to follow as he disappeared down an alleyway, opening a small door midway down the passage and entered a dimly lit room.

Cairns followed him inside and stopped. Jon was seated with four older men, talking without looking around. They ignored Cairns as he entered the room, looked around, and took a seat. Ten minutes later, Langston stood and picked up a small nondescript case that was beside him and walked to the door. Cairns stood quickly confused about the meeting and followed Langston out of the door, and back to the main street to the cyclos.

The cyclo boys started paddling the bucket bikes as soon as they sat down.

Cairns yelled across, "Jon, what was that all about?"

Jonathan looked at him, smiled, and continued talking rapidly to the Vietnamese as they turned the next corner heading towards the river. They talked and joked with each other until they reached the small park across from the Majestic Hotel.

Jonathan jumped out with his case under his arm, pulled an envelope from his pocket and gave it to the older Vietnamese who put it in his pocket quickly and paddled down the street not looking back.

"You haven't answered my question, you idiot," Cairns shouted trying to catch up with Langston who was half way across the street.

They walked into the main lobby of the Old French Colonial Hotel and went straight to the elevators in the far corner, pushing the up button. Cairns was asking the same questions. Langston ignored him until the doors closed and the car started moving.

"You ask too many questions, and you don't know when to listen and shut up. I couldn't afford to have you involved, and it was no good for those people to know who you really are. I'll tell you everything in a few minutes, but we both have phone calls to make before I do. Understood?" he asked as the door opened, and he walked down the corridor to the room overlooking the river.

When Geoffrey Cairns stepped into the large room, Jonathan was dialing a number. He turned and pointed to another phone in the corner. He turned to look out the window as he talked to an eighty-year-old friend a few blocks away through a telephone exchange in Dalat, 300 kilometers north of Saigon.

JONATHAN LANGSTON made three phone calls over the next thirty minutes, spoke at length, and listened. He wrote no notes and asked questions. The general was aroused from his sleep on the third call with an apology for the late call, and they spoke for most of the thirty minutes. At the end of the call, the general told him that the jet would be at Tan Son Nhat Airport the following afternoon. Jonathan hung up and looked across the room at Cairns who was having a shouting match with someone in Sydney. He hung up abruptly and turned to Jonathan.

"They're idiots," he said frustrated as he walked across the room and looked down at the deserted street next to the river. In the distance, he heard the horns of competing container ships maneuvering in the berthing areas in the deep water Saigon River.

Jonathan sat back in his seat and watched the man as he paced in front of the window mumbling under his breath.

Jonathan asked, "All right, what's the problem back in Sydney?"

"They can't find Frank Tan. He vanished off the face of the map, and they're making excuses. The NCA is blaming us, the idiots," he turned and looked at the case in the middle of the room. He walked quickly over to pick it up out of habit, and stopped when Langston yelled at him.

Cairns jumped back at the sound of Jonathan's voice and looked at him quizzically, and shouted back.

"What is wrong with you, Langston? What is so important about that case which you've been carrying all over this pathetic city in your arms?"

"If you'll sit down and relax, I'll tell you shortly. But for the moment we're going to talk. First, do you have any news on Bernier?"

"Not yet, except he's not in Australia."

"We know that already, so stop looking there," he replied, watching his expression. "Now, what's the real story on Tan?"

And they started talking, each man taking his turn. Jonathan explained about the courier carting money into Cambodia through customs in suitcases without being searched. Payments were being made to the customs' officials for it to go on for so long undetected. The governor of the National Bank of Cambodia was hopping mad and would be pulling the head of the local bank in the next morning for an explanation. If the explanation were not acceptable to the governor, the banker would be punished.

"How?" asked Cairns casually, and changed his expression when Jonathan replied simply, showing no emotion.

"With a bullet probably. And the greenbacks will be confiscated by the Central Bank. There will be a warning issued to all the bankers, and the customs people will be investigated. Anyone found guilty will face the same penalty as the banker. It's not because they're taking bribes, but they didn't disclose it properly through official channels."

"That a bit rough, isn't it?"

"Oh come on, Geoffrey. You've been around long enough to understand the rules, even your own, or do you want me remind you?" Jonathan said laughing at catching the ASIO strategist off base.

"Now, what happened to Tan?"

"The NCA lost contact with Frank Tan on the Sunday morning after a phone call had been received from a mystery American voice which was assumed to belong to Fred Wakely, the agency strategist from Langley. Sandhurst now has the recording, and he's doing a voice match on the recordings of Wakely's conversations in Canberra. He'll let me know this morning," Cairns said looking at his watch quickly to be sure. "I have work to do in a few hours. Who were the people we met tonight?"

Jonathan looked at the man sitting across from him and smiled. He explained that they were former top government and military people during the war. When the war ended, and the South lost, most of them were put into prison, or rehabilitation camps, for ten to fifteen years to break them or indoctrinate them to the will of the party. Some did break, and others obeyed until they were released. But they will never be allowed to hold any high position in government or private industry.

"Most of the highest officials during war ended up as what you saw tonight: cyclo drivers or small merchants or petty thieves just making a living to support families," Jonathan explained. "They're always watched by the Secret Police, which is why we were being cautious tonight. It's not good for them to be seen with foreigners. But they are old friends of Alexander and mine, so we took a small risk. They have a part in our plans eventually, and we keep feeding money to them to keep them going."

"What are you doing today?" Geoffrey asked walking around in the room, circling the small case, curiosity written on his face as he glanced at it.

"I have an old friend who is doing some checking on *Nguyen Thrang Tiep*. He's high in the government and a power player in the Central Bank, but he's more than that. His interest in Triangle Bank is intriguing. This morning, the central banks in Thailand, Cambodia

and Laos will start closing any accounts belonging to Triangle. All chaos will break loose, but the Triangle Bank people will not suspect anything for a few days, maybe a week. We're trying to figure out a way to dry up its funds here in Vietnam. It may be difficult if *Tiep* is involved from the top. We're putting pressure on them. Triangle Bank is the main link to the laundering operation of the drug cartel controlled by the mob and the rogue CIA agents," he said, pausing to look at Cairns who was staring at the case.

"Yes. Go ahead, I'm listening."

"Triangle's funds have been seized in Australia, U.S.A and, I believe, in Japan. Alexander's working on that end, trying to use the diplomatic channels with the President."

Jonathan stood and walked over to the window and watched a container ship maneuver its way up the river, followed by four tug-boats pushing and shoving the ship into place to be unloaded in the morning.

He turned to face Cairns.

"We need to find Bernier and Tan quickly. I'm concerned about the threat Bernier made on *Tuyet* and/or *Anh Phon*. They are using one of the girls to pull me in for the kill. That's why my *Montagnards* are there to protect them, and why I'm leaving in the morning to be with them. Also Alexander and I have a lot of work to do together. And we need to find the two CIA operatives that frightened Wakely. They are part of the cartel, and they're in this country undercover or in one of the other countries that are being shut down as part of Triangle. Wakely has been working against us and not with us, and he doesn't realize it. He'll have a problem when he returns to the States. He's out of his depth, and the agency will have to deal with him. Now, it's time for you to go unless you're sleeping on the couch."

Cairns turned to walk towards the door but stopped and looked at the case in the middle of the floor. Langston started laughing at him.

"That case really bothers you, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it does. We went all over this city tonight for that thing, and its bugging the daylights out of me."

Leaving It Behind

Langston stood, walked over, picked it up, and laid it on the table. He looked at the strategist and smiled as he clicked the latches. He opened the lid and reached inside, and threw a flat object at Cairns who caught it in mid air. He stared at the object in his hand, and shouted and started laughing.

"This is it! You went to all that trouble for this junk!"

"Yes, and it is worthwhile. The *Montagnards* will kill for chocolate bars, particularly if it's Belgian chocolate. That was what it was all about," he said pointing to the door. "And to see my old friends," he added to himself as the door closed.

TEN

THE LEAR JET ROLLED OUT of the clouds, floating gently past the islands off the coast and *Bao Dai's* Villas on the left, nestled on the hilltop, and commanding an interrupted view of the ocean below and islands in the distance. It was originally built as the summer home for *Bao Dai*, the last emperor of Vietnam under French colonial rule. But the emperor never lived there and after the war, the complex was taken over by the new government and converted into a hotel resort.

The small jet slowed, resting neatly on the air currents as it needled its way down the invisible corridor. The pilot made adjustments with his right hand to the computer control buttons, as he received instructions from the hidden control tower, the invisible eyes watching the movement on their radar screens of the aircraft coming in for a landing.

The sleek little jet shot through the guide path, its pointed nose lined up with the runway. The descent was slow and smooth; the nose lifted slightly, the wheels touching down smoothly like a pair of skates on ice. The pilot quickly reversed the engines, started the braking movements smoothly and efficiently, and turned into a side strip heading for a secluded hanger reserved for the small aircraft at the far end of the airport.

The heavy metal doors opened slowly as the pilot pulled gently into the Quonset hanger, braking for the last time, shutting down the engines.

Jonathan took off his seat belt, spoke quietly to the only two people in the small jet. He reached around to the back of his seat and picked up his small case and his carry bag. He stood slowly, bending over, as he walked down the narrow passageway to the door, which was swinging open. He reached under his jacket, touching the .45 automatic tucked neatly in its holster out of sight of roaming eyes.

Descending the narrow steps to the tarmac, he looked off in the distance adjusting his eyes to the late afternoon sun, feeling the tropical heat floating up from the tarmac hitting him in the face.

A small battered black car left over from the war days was waiting for him. He walked over and got into the open door as the driver sped away without looking back. Jonathan looked at the man dressed in casual clothes wearing a loose pair of sandals, his face smiling from under a baseball cap.

He turned and looked around smiling at the two *Montagnards* sitting in the back seat, their eyes shining with happiness at seeing their young friend. He started talking quickly with them and told them to open the small case, but limited them to one chocolate each. He turned around after a few minutes and spoke to the driver who was speeding down the coast road heading for the villa on the northern side of *Nha Trang*.

"It's good to see you again, *Quan*. I can see that you couldn't escape without the chief and his cousin."

"That's about the size of it, my friend," he said laughing. "Since those jokers are so well-informed, and they do have a few connections everywhere, we thought it best that they come with me to pick you up, or I'd never hear the end of it. The others at the villa are preparing a surprise for you, but we haven't told the girls that you're arriving. That has been one tricky situation, trying to keep a secret from *Tuyet* and *Anh Phon*. My dear wife has been bribing every ethnic around the villa trying to get information on your whereabouts to pass on to *Tuyet*. But she's getting nowhere, and the chief back there has

threatened anyone of his people with, God only knows what, if they say anything."

"And where are they now, if it's that bad?"

"Shopping and that's it. The general knows, but he's staying out of the picture. The old boy's enjoying being part of a large family, including your friends in the back. He takes long walks with them, and you'll never believe what they're collecting."

"Oh no, not those things again like years ago. Just keep me away from them."

Jonathan started laughing and turned, grabbing the small case as the chief was reaching for his second chocolate bar. The grinning ethnic was having difficulties handling the case and at the same time swiping the chocolate drooling down his chin.

Jon put the case on his lap and said amusingly to *Quan*, "These guys don't understand the word no, do they? One chocolate means the whole case if they could get away with it, and then complain like babies with an upset stomach," he said turning to face the old chief who was reaching for his cousin's bar.

Jon turned to look at *Quan* asking as he shook his head at the old chief, "What happened at the markets when you arrived? The general vaguely mentioned a shopping trip with them, and they terrorized the place."

"It wasn't that bad. Gave them money and told them to go shopping, and things got a little out of hand, but no harm done," *Quan* said laughing as he turned to look at his friend.

"*Tuyet* is going mad trying to get news about you. What are you going to do, my friend?"

"I really don't know, *Quan*. I miss her very much. We've been away from each other for far too long. But it all depends on her. I will continue to provide for her and protect her. I'm giving up this life after we finish this caper, and I do want to settle down. *Tong* has told me to sort out my life over here, and he meant with *Tuyet*. It seems that your wife has been telling him about *Tuyet* all these years, and he wants me to do something about it. He'll be over in a few days, but at the moment, he's pulling out all the stops trying to identify the mys-

tery man behind the cartel and banks. Triangle Bank was only the vehicle into the banks and a means of corrupting the bank executives. We need to find the leader or leaders and put the organization out of action," he said shifting his body quickly as *Quan* narrowly missed a motorcycle coming down the wrong side of the road.

Quan slowed down, and Jon started talking slowly about what they had discovered, and the missing links. No one could locate Frank Tan, who had been in Saigon a week earlier with Bernier, they had learned. They knew that he had vanished from Sydney and that David Neetham was dead, taken out by someone to silence him for some reason. *Tong* was checking with friends up North in Hanoi to learn more about *Tiep*, the mystery identity appearing when Jonathan wanted to talk to the central bankers about Triangle Bank's operations in Vietnam.

"Who tipped him off, or was it just a coincidence that he was at the meeting? And why did he produce a business card with a different position in Saigon and not Hanoi?" Jon asked the question out loud as *Quan* drove through the narrow streets of *Nha Trang* heading for the bridge that would take them north and to the villa.

Quan slowed and pulled over to the side of the road, and said to Jonathan, "You really have pissed off some people in this part of the world, but we're getting close to finding the invisible mystery man. It's only time. But first, we need to keep you alive. You know they want you dead, but before they kill you, they want the information you have. It seems that they don't know about the general or the foundation. The real owner of the villa is still a secret, and no one knows that you and the general are here."

"I know all of this," Jon said slowly, sadness in his voice. "When is this thing going to stop?"

"Soon, we hope," *Quan* said slowly.

"There are a few things happening at the moment," Jon continued talking slowly, gathering his thoughts, and trying to connect the missing links to a puzzle.

He turned looking at the older men in the backseat, saying to *Quan*, "These guys in the back have no worries in the world at the

moment, but I wouldn't want to cross them. *Tong's* pulling out his little bag of contacts like in the old days, and he's using many of our old friends who have the knowledge of the corrupt systems in this country and the dirty tricks that are being played. He's pulling in all of his old favors, calling in the contracts owed."

Quan turned to look at the ethnic men on the back seat and said to Jonathan, "By the way, did you hear that the Cambodian Central Bank seized twenty million dollars about three hours ago from the local bank which was ready to pay it out this afternoon to the suppliers up North?"

"No, I haven't had time to speak with *Tong*."

"The cartel took delivery of the merchandise yesterday, and the drug lords were expecting payment this afternoon. The couriers took the money through customs and to the bank yesterday. It was a matter of time before the payment was to be made. The bank has advised the recipients of the money, the drug lords, and that it had received a stop payment order from the purchaser overseas. Apparently, it's a normal arrangement for the delivery of money by courier, and it has been going on for some time without us learning about the system. *Tong's* looking into it. The Central Bank governor was angry as hell that the local bank top executives had been doing this arrangement for sometime without his knowledge. It's all going to come to a head between the drug lords and the mob in the States."

"What happened to the local bank people?" Jon asked partially knowing the answer.

"They're under arrest, and the government will decide later. The suppliers are demanding money for merchandise shipped; the Central Bank has told them that the money went back to the U.S. customer as was instructed. The merchandise is probably out of the country and enroute to whatever destination it was heading. There will be a big fight over this one, and we need to be cautious and stay out of their conflict. And," he started laughing; "the governor has made the usual donation to the foundation for this exercise. The balance went to the bank and government. They're determined to stop the drug trade, but they'll hate losing out on the extra money."

"All right," he said laughing. "It's time to go home and see what surprises these guys have cooked up for me. And I want to see *Tuyet*," he said as he opened the small case and tossed two chocolate bars to the four hands clinging to the seat, tongues drooling for more energy.

THEY WEAVED THEIR WAY SLOWLY up the dirt road into the flat valley tucked away in the mountainous region four kilometers north of *Nha Trang*. At the end of the valley, they would come back to the coast where the villa sat in total seclusion. Rice paddies lay side by side on both sides of the road. They passed through the occasional hamlet as they bounced over the potholes filled with water and rattled over concealed rocks in the roadbed. The paddies climbed the valley, stopping abruptly at the base of the hills. Peasants worked in the fields, looking up occasionally in curiosity as the lone car passed. People walked on the road, moving to the side of the roadbed as they passed.

The *Montagnard* chief became talkative after his chocolate boost, looking in all directions pointing out the sights. The others were ignoring his incessant chatter. The men in the front seat sat quietly with their own thoughts for what was ahead of them.

Three kilometers into the valley, *Quan* stopped the car in front of a small road, leading into a smaller canyon that disappeared into the hills around the bend 500 meters away. The road wasn't used that often, and grass was growing in the tracks. They continued along the slippery track. *Quan* slowed and pressed a concealed button under the dashboard; moments later his radio buzzed. He listened and acknowledged the unseen person.

He spoke briefly, telling the person on the other end that they were in the smaller valley and now heading for the villa on the coast.

"The area has been cleared," *Quan* said looking at Jonathan. "Our little friends have been all through the hills to make sure that everything is safe. The villagers nearby have been invited over for a feast that's being prepared. And you're not to know about it," he said, pausing as he maneuvered the car around the narrow entrance to the forest that led to the clearing where the villa stood.

"The general," *Quan* continued, "has used this occasion as an excuse for all the ethnics and villagers who work at the villa to get to know each other better. The girls have been told that you'll arrive soon, in a few days perhaps."

Quan stopped the car and looked at Jon, combing his hand through his short, crew cut hair. He had stopped just before making the last turn into the front yard of the enormous villa ahead, with the six smaller houses dotted around the grounds for the people who lived and worked on the estate. The villa had originally been built by a wealthy French merchant sixty years earlier, and during the war days used as command headquarters in the district by the American High Command.

The general had often stayed there when he was in the area, which was why he knew about the place. When the foundation was formed and became secretly active in Vietnam, the general decided that villa would be the ideal secluded spot for their operations in Southeast Asia. The rest was up to Jonathan and *Quan* to secure the ownership rights on behalf of the foundation. And it became their future home, at a huge price for maintaining secrecy.

"And what am I supposed to do now?" asked a startled Jonathan Langston as the chief opened the passenger door and told him to get out.

The chief smiled, showing a grin full of missing teeth, and said, "You, my son, are going to walk home in about ten minutes. We want you to surprise the girls. Now, out of the car now my younger brother, before we pull you out for not obeying."

Jonathan started laughing, realizing that it was useless to argue. As he stepped out of the car, he grabbed the small case and said harshly, "I'm taking this, so you don't get your greedy little paws on the contents. If you're more polite, I may give you another one later."

"That's a deal!" the old chief shouted in broken English as he jumped into seat next to *Quan* and telling him to "drive the car".

Jonathan stood and watched the car as it rounded the bend, bouncing over the potholes and disappearing on the last straight patch of road to the villa. He could feel his pulse beat faster in anticipation of

what was ahead of him. What was he going to do if she was disappointed with him? he wondered. Had she found someone else? Or was this all a dream? he kept asking himself. Of all the women in the world, I have always been drawn back to her just like the old lady predicted years ago.

He looked at his watch and decided to give them an extra ten minutes to wait. Besides, those mountain people never wear watches anyway, he thought. He would make the old chief wait for his next chocolate fix; he decided and walked over to sit down on a log under the coconut trees at the side of the dirt road. Out of habit, his eyes searched the area for the crawling creatures that he hated.

Ten minutes turned into twenty minutes when he looked at his watch again, deciding that it was time to go. The birds chirped overhead as he sat in deep thought, feeling the breeze floating through the grove. He enjoyed these rare moments of peace sitting under the trees. This was where he always felt at peace with himself. It had always been that way since he was a child.

He started to stand, reaching for the case at the same time. He turned his head quickly. It had disappeared. He jumped to his feet, and turned around to face a grinning chief who held the case with both hands, giggling deeply at catching Jonathan by surprise. His eyes flashed with the enjoyment of being able to catch the young man unaware of his presence.

He said cheerfully, "If you think I'm leaving you with our chocolates by yourself to eat, you're crazy. Now, follow me by the back way, careless boy," he scolded. "Everyone's at the front of the villa, so we can sneak up in the back of the place without being seen."

Jonathan started to say something, but the old man was trotting down the path into the coconut grove. He started after him, but at a slower pace realizing that the old man was enjoying himself and whatever surprise he had cooked up. Will it work with her? he asked himself.

"I've been running away from her and every woman that came into my life. It's time to stop running and be responsible for my true feel-

ings. I owe them," he said out loud as he trotted along the path, catching a glimpse of the huge house ahead.

The white colonial structure came into sight as he slowed and walked to the edge of the enormous garden surrounding the villa. So perfect in every respect, an ideal setting for a romantic encounter, he decided.

He walked across the grounds, hearing the noise coming from the front lawns where the feast was beginning. He could hear *Quan*'s laughter as *Thrang* told another joke, the favorite pastime of the Vietnamese. It's good that they have become friends, he thought, and not the old enemies of years ago.

He could see the mixture of people through the huge windows as he stood at the back veranda, searching for *Tuyet*, but he couldn't see her. He knew she was there somewhere, but she wasn't with the general who stood laughing with the men. Then he saw *Anh Phon* walking over towards them with drinks.

There was a movement behind him, a noise that made him stiffen his back instinctively, his ears alert. He turned slowly and stopped breathing for moments as he stared at her. The afternoon rays from the sun were shining on her black hair, giving each strand a life of its own. The deep blue eyes sparkled and moved over him slowly. And then the dimple appeared, as she smiled showing the white teeth that glistened between her smooth moist lips.

His eyes moved over her and caressed the shape of her body under the light blue silk dress that flowed with the breeze coming out of the groves. He inhaled deeply trying to say something, but the words wouldn't leave his mouth. Another noise distracted him, and he turned his head slowly searching for the intrusion, but his mind couldn't concentrate; his eyes kept returning to her smile.

Standing behind him the *Montagnard* chief stood watching him and grinning, a chocolate hanging from the corner of his mouth. He stepped up to Jonathan and said, nudging him with his hand as he took the bar from his mouth.

"If you don't go to her now, I'll drag her away, and find a better man for her, maybe one of my younger men."

He started laughing at Jonathan's expression and nudged him again. They both laughed as *Tuyet* watched the two friends, understanding their affection for each other.

Jon turned and looked at her, the pain deep in his soul. He took several steps and lifted his arms as she flew into his chest; her face lifted towards his. He pulled her close to him and looked into her blue eyes letting his eyes float down to her lips. When they kissed, the noise around them disappeared, and they held each other for a long time, clinging to each other's body, feeling the comfort of being together. Slowly, Jon came out of the darkest depths of where he had lived and appeared in the light. She was still with him, holding to him, pulling his head down to her again.

Something was tugging at his arm, pulling him. He tried to shake it free, but it continued. She moved against him wanting to hold him, but she was also being pulled away. They broke and slowly looked around at the twenty odd *Montagnards* standing in a circle around them clapping their hands and laughing with joy. Jon stepped back from *Tuyet*, but held her hand pulling her closer to him as the *Montagnards* converged on them, surrounding the couple as one of them.

The general, *Quan*, and *Anh Phon* stood silently at the corner of the villa watching and smiling, not wanting to interrupt this event of happiness.

Tuyet and Jonathan stood in the center of the little mountain men and started laughing with them, enjoying their joy and merriment. Jon greeted each one of them, most he hadn't seen in over twenty years, and they started asking questions rapidly about his life. Finally, the chief pulled a whistle and blew it, and there was silence as he spoke.

"We must be proud of our Jon. He will now become an honest man, as he has finally decided to be with this wonderful lady, who is part of us. Now everyone must join in the feast with *Tuyet* and Jon. He is home with us, and we are here to make sure that they are safe. Let them be together for now, and we'll all have the chance to talk with our brother later," he commanded.

Turning to face Jonathan, he added with a big grin, "And he didn't forget our chocolates," as he opened the small case in his hand

proudly, letting the chocolate bars flow to the ground. He reached over quickly before the others saw what had happened, grabbed a handful, and ran towards the front of the house.

Then mayhem took place as the little fun-loving people dove for the chocolates on the ground. It was a free-for-all as *Tuyet* and *Jon* ran to the corner of the villa, turned and watched the battle. *Jon* pulled her close and turned to look in her eyes. The dimple appearing on her face as she smiled. He felt the moisture coming from his eyes for the first time in many years.

He felt the healing process of the past taking place, as he said to her, "I should have said this many years ago but I didn't, and I couldn't. And I have lived to regret it many times and almost lost you. But I love you very much, *Tuyet Gervais*."

THE FEAST ROLLED ON. Everyone ate more than their share and then came back for more. The *Montagnards* took turns visiting the hills in their security arrangements, relieving each person on duty so everyone could be part of the family. The general was in his happiest mood, always talking and mixing with everyone. *Tuyet* stayed with *Jon*, and when she was cosseted away by *Anh Phon* or *Quan*, she grabbed his hand and pulled him with her.

Once she said giggling with happiness, "I'm not letting you out of my sight, you swine."

They walked around and spoke to everyone. The general trailed behind and occasionally was able to say a few words to *Jon* in between *Tuyet* and *Anh Phon* taking breaks.

Only one incident happened at the feast that afternoon. It happened suddenly when one of the village men, the gardener, who was loyal to the family, became a little too aggressive after too much local wine. He had smuggled a bottle from his house at the back of the estate, drank a lot, and started an argument with one of the other villagers over a trifling thing.

The general stood at the sidelines with *Jon* and *Tuyet* amused with the situation, watching the anger becoming more aggressive in the

man. The words flowed rapidly. His unfortunate wife tried to stop him and was told to keep out, Jonathan explained.

"Don't worry, General. They will argue at times, and to us, it sounds like it will go too far. But eventually they sort it out between themselves, and usually when one of them gets too tired, or," he said pointing at the four *Montagnards* as they walked behind him with the chief.

"Or when more reasonable men prevail. The chief doesn't put up with that rubbish. I'll bet you haven't seen any arguments between the mountain guys, have you?"

"No, I haven't. Tell me, how did you come to know them so well? They treat you like one of them, and the trust is total between you and them."

"It is, and it happened by accident when I was in the high country before the end of the war, tracing the drug operations. The Vietnamese hate the *Montagnards*, but they fear the brutality of the mountain men. A North Vietnamese Army platoon had attacked one of the villages on the Laotian border and had the people pinned down. I happened to be near the village in the hills and lobbed a few grenades in the middle of the platoon. *Quan* was with me, and we raced through the village knocking off any stragglers as they fled for the hills. Two soldiers had the chief tied up and were ready to rape his daughter when I charged through the door and shot them."

Jon stopped talking quickly and looked at *Tuyet* regretting that he had spoken too quickly about saving the chief's daughter. The general saw the tension and pain on the younger man's face as he watched the couple but said nothing. He realized that it was something they had to deal with. *Tuyet* saw that Jonathan was uneasy with his comments, and reached up touching his face, smiling, her eyes sparkling.

She said, gently rubbing his face, "I'll never forget what you did for me, for saving my life from the same degrading experience, not once, but the second time in Laos with that mad Frenchman. If you hadn't been there when you were, we would not be together today, my warrior knight. I love you for that and for many more reasons."

She reached up and gave him a kiss, and turned towards the general, saying gently, "I owe Jon my life. Many other people owe him their lives, like the chief and his family. Jon has given so much without asking for anything in return. I understand the love that he has for these people and their loyalty to him. It's a simple matter of trust and giving and not expecting anything in return. Alexander, that is what Jon has with these people and with us. They will do anything for him without asking for anything in return, but it also goes the same in reverse, and they know it."

Tuyet paused for a moment and looked at the two men who respected each other, understanding that their deep respect was based on a father and son relationship.

She reached for Jon's hand and turned to Sloan, smiling and said happily, "Alexander, this man, I have always loved but he was too afraid to make a commitment for himself or for me. We almost lost each other when I married Marc Lavoie, but he saved me from an impossible situation and never asked for anything in return. Al, I love this man, and I don't want to lose him again," she said, looking at Jon. "I hope you understand," she started to continue but stopped as a brown set of hands reached around her from the back and gently squeezed her.

She jumped, spun around, and started laughing as the chief said happily, "Little *Tuyet*, we are a simple people, but we are a proud people. You are one of us like our brother, Jon," and looking at Alexander Sloan, he continued, "And you are definitely one of us. Now, will all of you join me, and I'll show you a few surprises?"

As they started walking behind the chief whose short legs propelled him faster than them, *Tuyet* stopped suddenly, asking, "Jon, where is that mad Frenchman from Laos? I don't believe he was killed when he jumped out that window."

"He's alive, and we almost had him in Sydney last week, but he escaped with some help. He's in Saigon, we think, and *Quan* and I will be going after him in a few days. There are many things we need to do, and many things we need to discuss with Alexander. Plans need to be made, and you and *Anh Phon* must stay here for your own

protection until this is over. We'll talk later, my darling, because I want out of this mess, and I need a sane life with you, if you'll have it that way."

Tuyet looked at him and smiled; the happiness showed in her eyes as she started walking. She didn't need to say anything. Her body movements said it all for them.

They walked around the large property, stopping as the chief pointed to certain things under large covers lying on the ground. He spoke in Vietnamese and nothing was translated for Sloan. They saw where the men were posted in the hills, but only when the chief blew his whistle telling them to show themselves. Jon explained to Alexander that these mountain people were guerrilla fighters in the truest sense, which was a big reason that the Vietnamese feared them.

They walked in the hills for an hour, the feast below over, and being cleared up. There was no rush to return, and everyone was enjoying the walk, feeling the breeze and the afternoon sun shining down on them.

At one point, the chief put up his little brown hand, stopping everyone. Jon smiled as the chief ran up the trail on his fast little legs. He came back a few minutes later smiling, showing his prize to Jon. *Tuyet* gasped, and Alexander stepped back quickly.

"What are you going to do with that thing?" asked a stunned retired general.

Jon started laughing and turned to walk down the hill, saying quickly to the chief, "You keep that cobra away from me, you little fool."

"I'm not a fool. I need this for our protection," he said grinning, walking down the path heading across the hill towards the villa, carrying a meter long wiggling reptile, his hand in a vice grip behind the creature's neck.

"What protection?" shouted an uneasy general who was looking around for any playmates lingering in the area.

"I'll show you when we get home, Al. We have been walking around those creatures all afternoon. These guys use cobras as a silent

weapon, and it's effective," Jon said as he took *Tuyet's* hand and headed down the path.

The general stood for a few minutes trying to understand what Jon said. They know what they're doing, I hope, he thought, looking around uneasily feeling the goose bumps running up his back at the thought of stumbling onto a cobra on his own.

Alexander Sloan caught up with the three people as they arrived in the gardens around the villa. The chief had summoned two of his people, and they were busy doing something with the cobra when he walked up to them. He looked at Jon, a questioning grimace on his face.

Jon turned and started laughing, saying, "You were always protected from what happens out here."

"Get real, Langston," Sloan said joining in with the laughter. "What are they doing?"

"They are attaching a long very thin strong piano wire around the snakes' mid-section, and then they anchor it to the ground about six meters from the reptile. That allows him enough room to crawl around, but don't think about walking around in that six-meter circumference. He'll bite anything that comes close, and he's one mad reptile for being tied up. When they put the cloth over him, he'll stay reasonably quiet. And at night, they remove the covering and feed them," he added turning to watch the chief anchor the snake. "You don't want to walk around at night without knowing where they are. They have the monsters placed all around the place. Come, we'll show you," he said as he started walking.

Jon stopped ten meters away and turned around. Sloan was fascinated with the *Montagnards*. He stood watching as they toyed with the snake, forcing it to rear up and strike, making it angrier.

Jon's cell phone rang in his pocket, and he spoke as he watched the general and the *Montagnards*. *Tuyet* stood next to him, her arms around his shoulders, occasionally leaning over to kiss him. He spoke and looked at her, feeling the happiness flowing from his inner soul. She listened to the one-sided conversation, and concern was written on her face.

He finished the call and watched the mountain men toying with the serpent. He shouted across to them and started walking slowly with *Tuyet*. The general caught up with them and started talking about what he had seen with the chief, amazed that the hill people took the snakes for granted and used them as part of everyday living.

Jon added quickly with a laugh, "Yes, and they eat the things as well."

"You must be kidding!" he shouted after them as he trotted to catch up. The *Montagnards* raced past them heading towards the odd patch of material spread around the large garden. They watched in fascination as they gently lifted the fabric and jumped back as the snakes reared, prepared to strike at the intruders.

They walked along slowly inspecting the *Montagnards* security arrangements around the grounds of the villa. The chief told them that the men stayed concealed on the high vantagepoints in the hills, and that they had a system of communicating with whistles. Sloan was fascinated with their sense of protecting themselves; the guerilla tactics were effective. They were there to protect the occupants of the villa, and they would do just that at any cost.

The chief walked between Jon and *Tuyet*. He took their hands and walked with them; a sign of affection that would have been difficult for a westerner to understand.

Jonathan smiled at the old man and said slowly to Sloan walking beside him, "*Quan* and I will be leaving in a few days, and *Tong* will come back here with the jet."

"Why?" he asked, concern showing in his voice.

"*Tong* and our old friends have located Bernier and Tan. We've decided to wait and let them make a move. They don't know anything about the banks in the other countries, so they think they're safe from scrutiny at the moment. Bernier is hurt badly, and they're hiding out in one of the government villas reserved for party officials. And that would have taken special arrangements to organize."

Sloan and *Tuyet* listened as Jonathan spoke. He told them how they had traced and tracked Tan and Bernier. They had been picked

up at Tan Son Nhat Airport in an area reserved for official government people and whizzed off in a darkened limousine.

"How is *Tong* these days? I'm amazed that he's still alive. He must be in his eighties by now."

"He is, Al, and still full of life. He's looking forward to seeing you, and," turning to look at *Tuyet*, "he ordered me to sort out my life over here. Apparently, he and *Anh Phon* talk to each other frequently, and he was keeping tabs on *Tuyet* and me. We need to get him out of Saigon because he'll take a risk there that's not necessary. I owe him that, and he's just as effective here as he is there, and you two can catch up with each other."

"Fine with me. When he comes, this is what I need, and he's to bring the guys you met up with last night."

The little group continued walking and talking until late afternoon. They made their way back towards the villa, smelling the odors of food coming slowly from the kitchen. The tables were placed in the garden again. *Quan* and *Anh Phon* rushed around giving orders and laughed with the villagers of the estate.

Thrang came running up with two of the *Montagnards* on his heels and spoke rapidly with the chief. He twisted his head quickly to look in the direction of the dirt road leading into the estate. *Jon* and *Tuyet* had walked to the veranda and were sitting down, holding hands and talking when the old man ran over shouting at him excitedly.

"Did you tell anyone you were coming here?"

"Only an Australian who's working with me, but he's in Saigon. He only knows that we're in *Nha Trang* but not the location of the villa. The pilots are staying in *Nha Trang*. Why?"

"There are two people in a small car coming up the road, and they're not one of us. What do you want us to do?"

"Keep everyone out of sight. *Quan* and I'll meet them. Alexander and the girls are to go inside. Have your people positioned near the road, but out of sight. If something goes wrong, or I'm not satisfied, I'll give you a palm up signal. Take them, but don't kill them."

Leaving It Behind

Jonathan started to say something, but the old man was racing off with the *Montagnards* whistling a signal to his men. *Thrang* ran behind them heading towards the road's entry to the property.

Jonathan turned to Alexander quickly and said, "You should go inside with *Tuyet* and *Anh Phon*. Just stay out of sight while we talk to our visitors," he ordered, turning his head as he heard the engine noise coming down the small dirt road.

The noise came closer as the car slid over the wet grass on the dirt road. He could see it coming around the bend, bouncing as it hit the potholes. He could see the two people clearly in the front seat as the car drew nearer to the parking area. He and *Quan* stood in the open watching the vehicle come to a stop.

Jonathan said to *Quan* as he looked at the area where the car parked, "I hope they're not hostile, because they're in between four of the covers hiding the chief's little pets. All they have to do is pull the covers back quickly with the wire, and bingo! The boys are over in the groves on each side of the car just waiting. Come on. Let's see what they want," he instructed, as he watched two men climb out of the car slowly and stretch.

Quan and Jonathan walked slowly towards the car. The men stood still until one of them reached into his jacket, searching for something. Jonathan shouted, and put his hand inside his jacket.

"I wouldn't be reaching for anything that's dangerous, if I were you. Now, can we help you? This is private property."

The taller of the two men wearing a jacket over a tee shirt reached into his pocket again and slowly pulled out a cell phone, which was ringing. Jonathan and *Quan* slowly walked in a wider arc opposite of each other, giving themselves ample room to move quickly if they had to.

The man spoke on the cell phone, keeping his eyes on Jonathan as he walked casually to the side. The shorter of the two men was standing next to one of the covers. *Quan* winced when the man almost stepped on the cover, but stopped, as he listened to the conversation of his colleague.

The taller man stopped talking and placed the mobile phone on the hood of the car. He turned and walked around to the door and reached inside the car and took out a backpack and threw it on the ground in front of the car. He walked to the front and glared at Langston, saying something to his companion.

He shouted from fifteen meters at Jonathan in a heavy New York accent.

"Do you recognize that bag?"

Jonathan glanced at the bag and inhaled deeply. The short man with a dirty beard and long hair owned it, and he had raced down the street yesterday with the thing, he realized. He glanced over at *Quan*, who was still moving slowly to the far left as if he was not part of the scenery.

"Well, do you recognize the bag?" he shouted again.

"And why do you ask, and who are you?"

"I have a message for you. Come with us, and tell us what you know about Triangle Bank, and your friend may have a chance to live."

"And who is this friend, and what am I supposed to know?"

"Come off it, Langston," he shouted. "Geoffrey Cairns was with you last night, and you took two of our people. We took him this morning as he left his hotel. That gave us a chance to talk to him with the help of some drugs to loosen his tongue. The rest was easy. He repeated *Nha Trang* many times, under the sodium influence, and the rest was fairly simple, if you have the right contacts. Now, are you coming with us?"

"There's no reason for me to come with you, and I don't think you can force me."

The tall man in the tee shirt reached into his jacket; his dark bushy eyebrows wiggled with his expression as he spoke to his colleague standing next to ground cover. The shorter man started to take a step and stopped again, as the tall man turned quickly and yelled in the direction of the car.

Sloan and *Tuyet* stood side by side watching the men in the garden wondering what was going on.

Anh Phon walked up and stood beside them asking, "What's going on out there?"

"We don't know. We can't hear anything, but *Jon* and *Quan* are positioning themselves for an attack," *Sloan* said turning his head to look out into the garden again. "I wish I could help, but *Jon* made it clear that we don't expose ourselves. And he's right. Whatever is going to happen, *Jon* and *Quan* are covered by our friends."

What happened next caused *Tuyet* to gasp. The back doors of the car flew open. Two men jumped out with automatic rifles. One man walked quickly up to the shorter man near the ground cloth and stood with the barrel of the rifle pointing towards the ground. The other man walked over to the side about five meters from the leader and stopped. Behind him was another large ground cover. The tall man shouted again, looking around slowly at the positions of his men.

"Does this convince you to come with us? If you have weapons on you, I would put them on the ground."

He nodded his head slowly and smiled, as the two men slowly raised the gun barrels. What happened next shocked the four men, as they stood ready for a confrontation in front of them. They were not prepared for the move.

Jonathan turned slowly and opened his jacket showing the .45 automatic.

The tall man shouted, "Put it on the ground in front of you, and no tricks, or you die, and your friend will die, too! Then, we'll kill anyone we find on this property. We have other men who will be here in about five minutes."

Jonathan smiled as his eyes moved slowly over the four men. He looked at *Quan* and smiled, and slowly raised his hands in front of him. The tall man watched him closely, and put his hand in his jacket and pulled out an automatic, holding it at his side.

Jon slowly started nodding his head and smiled. He slowly turned the palms upwards. The three men turned quickly as the covers next to their legs were jerked from the ground, and they screamed as the mad Cobras reared and struck repeatedly. They were within the six-meter circumference, and they didn't have a chance. The speed of the

strikes totally disarmed the men as they dropped their weapons trying to get away from the deadly creatures that were advancing towards them for another strike.

The tall man yelled at them in the confusion as they ran, each man holding a part of their body that had taken a hit from the deadly fangs. They screamed in fear and agony and ran to the middle of the garden, falling to the ground and rolling over, yelling in pain.

The leader spun around, but Langston wasn't in the same position. He looked to where *Quan* had been standing, and he wasn't there. He whirled around, to find a .45 automatic pointing at him from three meters away, and a voice barking.

"Drop it or you're dead, just like these men will be in about five minutes, if they don't get an injection for the poison. Your choice, but you'll die anyway."

The tall man looked at his men quickly and raised his gun rapidly to fire but was thrown backwards as the .45 penetrated his right shoulder, his gun flying into the air.

Jonathan spun around with his gun leveled as the *Montagnards* ran out from their concealed positions. They ran around retrieving all the guns. Several of the lucky warriors had the task of calming the cobras and putting covers back over them.

Quan walked over towards him and said quickly, "The *Montagnards* and *Thrang* are coming down the road with the second group of four people, all Americans from New York. It looks like the mob is hopping mad if they're throwing that much manpower behind capturing you. Man, you've really have upset some people," he said laughing.

"How did they catch them so easily?" Jon asked looking at *Quan* who was still laughing.

"It easy for these guys. The bad guys were driving an open Range Rover, which was lucky. It's crashed, and I don't think it will be driven for awhile."

"Well, what happened?"

Quan was laughing as he saw the *Montagnards* marching the four men down the dirt road in the distance, two of them hobbling badly and in pain.

"The Range Rover made it to the bend and slowed down. The boys tossed in two bundles of joy into the front seat, and the rest you can imagine," he said, bending over unable to contain his laughter.

They turned and started walking towards the villa as the front door flew open. Sloan and *Tuyet* ran out, followed by *Anh Phon*, across the veranda, down the steps and across the garden. When they arrived near the group of men, they could hear the *Montagnards* giggling as they injected antivenim into the shoulders of five screaming men who had taken a direct hit from the chief's pets.

Jon reached the running group first, and *Tuyet* ran into his arms, holding him tightly, trying to talk. She looked up at his face and saw the concern written on his forehead.

She pulled him closer and kissed him, saying gently, "I was worried about you, about all of you, but Alexander said it had to be done this way. Are you all right, my love?"

"Yes but we need to talk; we all need to talk because the monster has changed colors again, and I don't like it," he said softly, trying to find the words to relax.

He looked around slowly at the *Montagnards* as they nursed the injured men, and tied the three uninjured men up. The chief ran over, grinning from ear to ear, enjoying the excitement. Jon held *Tuyet* tightly against him, a need to feel that she was close. Alexander stood with *Quan* watching the hill people do their work rapidly, feeling fondness for them and the speed at which they worked. *Anh Phon* joined her husband and put her arms around him, brushing the tears away.

The covers were being placed over the chief's pets, and things were almost back to normal. Or were they? Sloan wondered, as he walked over to stand with the couple holding hands.

"What happened, Jon?" Sloan asked and waited patiently as Jon punched a local number and spoke briefly, asking that the pilots' phone as soon as they returned.

Jon turned to look at *Tuyet*, trying to hold back his feelings, his rage, but realized that he was having difficulties. He had wanted to kill the leader from New York and had come close to it. At the last moment, he had moved his aim slightly realizing that they needed to question the man, interrogate the hell out of the idiot, like in the old days. The man was going to regret living before the day was over, and he would tell them where Cairns was or die. Jonathan knew he didn't care. He had no emotions towards the man or to any of the others. He would break them with the ways of the mountain men.

His only emotions were with the woman beside him and the family on the estate. He looked in her eyes as she smiled, the dimple appearing. She reached up and brushed her tears away and then touched his face, understanding his anger. She could feel his body trembling as she held him tightly.

The chief stood silently watching the emotions flow through Jon and *Tuyet*, but he didn't want to interfere. They were part of his family, and he was there to make sure they were protected. He looked at Sloan who smiled at him sheepishly. Then he turned to watch the *Montagnards* lead the eight men to the house at the back of the property.

The chief turned to Jon and said as a fact, and not asking permission, "I have called for our other tribes' people in *Nha Trang* to get their lazy butts out here to back us up. They'll be here within the hour, and they will form a perimeter around this place. No one will get in. And tonight, no one will be allowed to walk around the edges of this property," he said smiling.

"And why not?" asked a confused general.

The chief started laughing as he looked over in the distance, enjoying keeping the man in suspense.

He turned and looked at *Tuyet*, and said lovingly, "You are precious to us and to this man. Have faith in us as we have faith in you. Jon will need all the help he can get, and we mustn't lose him. You, *Tuyet*, are one of us like he is, and we adore you, our little snowbird."

He reached over and put his arms around her, and then to Jon, he said. "I love you too, and I'm proud of you, but now we have work to do."

He looked at Sloan and said, "Tonight our pets will be crawling around freely attached to their wires with no blankets to keep them warm. They will be fed well, but they will be angry after being disturbed today, so don't go near them. They will be aggressive and they do bite," he said giggling with his hand over his missing teeth.

Sloan looked at the man, admiring his ability to laugh at danger and the odds. He turned to face Jonathan, asking but not expecting the response and realized immediately that he had made a mistake.

"Jon, do you think it necessary for me to call the American Ambassador and have him send some Marines down to protect this place?"

Jon's words jumped across the lawn as he exploded.

"We don't need the stupid Marines or the Army down here to start another war. They're useless!" he said slowing down, feeling the pressure on his arm as *Tuyet* gripped him, reassuring him that she was there to support him.

"I'm sorry, General, for the outburst, but these people are all we need, and they are far better defenders. We're not in a political war. It's a drug war and, in some ways, far more brutal. I'm really pissed off and for a good reason," he said watching the general's reaction and understanding as he nodded his head in agreement.

"I saw my life disappear out there against those guns. Just when I made that final step to be with *Tuyet*, that life was being taken away from me, and I was angry. I was terrified of losing her, of losing all of you, but *Tuyet* especially. When I saw the guns being raised with me in the open and totally exposed, I wasn't sure if the cobra trick was going to work. I moved my hands out there in blind faith, believing in and trusting the *Montagnards* totally, and wanting desperately to live and to be with *Tuyet*. God, it was a miserable few minutes out there." He turned and held her closer and said, "I'm sorry, but for the first time in my life, the fear consumed me, and I was accepting that I was not going to come out alive. Now, there are other things we have to

talk about, because my original plans for this evening of being with *Tuyet* and the people I love have been changed. And that's what makes me really angry," he said turning to look at the chief who was stamping his feet on the ground.

The little man was pointing his finger at Jonathan, the grin had disappeared, and his eyes were blazing.

"You mean you didn't trust my people and my pets to do a simple job. How dare you, Jonathan! You need to be trained again," he said laughing as if nothing had happened.

Jonathan walked over to the chief and put his arms around him, saying gently, "I never lost faith in you or your people. I momentarily lost faith in myself. I didn't know if I could survive to live beyond today to see you and *Tuyet* again."

He turned slowly and spoke to the general, "And I have a father for once in my life, and I was selfish enough not to want to lose that," he said reaching up to brush the tears away, and turned to hold and to kiss *Tuyet*.

He said to everyone around, "Let's sit on the veranda and make plans. My plans for tonight have been screwed up, but we have things to do and quickly. And I need to talk to *Tong*.

As they walked towards the villa, *Tuyet* leaned over to him and whispered, "The night is not over yet my lover, and I do need you more than you'll ever realize. I love you," she said running towards the villa to take her favorite chair.

Jon stood and watched her run, feeling life flowing back into his body again, and the ache of needing someone, who he had denied all these years, a comforting presence.

ELEVEN

THE MEMORIES OF THE WAR DAYS came back rapidly as they mapped out strategies. The general was the planner and strategist. Jonathan and *Quan* did what they did best: planned the strikes and deep cover operations, the clandestine manipulations that were part of the tactics created by the head of Army Intelligence during the war.

The cool breeze was floating in from the South China Sea; the waves splashed on the shoreline in the distance. The birds were frolicking in the trees, chirping warnings to be wary of the dangers crawling on the ground. Everyone on the veranda was enjoying the moments of peace around them, accepting the tasks ahead and recognizing the dangers in their path.

The leaders of the drug cartel had to be found, to be isolated. Triangle Bank was at the center, but now the mob was involved in a big way, and they had killers under their control. How many more have been flown in? they wondered, as they talked, and who was issuing the orders?

Tong was working with his contacts to locate the two CIA agents wandering around Asia or in Vietnam. And he was trying to find any clue as to the whereabouts of Geoffrey Cairns. That was top priority, in Jonathan Langston's eyes. The ASIO clown had a brilliant mind, was a superb strategist in clandestine operations, but he was a man who took too many unnecessary risks.

The central banks within the perimeter of the Golden Triangle were moving deliberately against any bank involved in money laundering or supplying money to the drug suppliers to move the raw merchandise into the international distribution chain. The organized crime buyers gave their millions for more millions of guaranteed supplies. And there was a small group in the middle controlling the entire flow, but they couldn't find the leader of that group. The only thing that was certain was that Triangle Bank was the vehicle at the center. The leaders had to surface.

At one point, Alexander Sloan pounded his hand on the table and looked around asking in frustration, "Where is Serge Bernier and Frank Tan, and how does *Nguyen Thrang Tiep* fit in? Or does he? It doesn't seem possible that a man so highly placed in this government would be involved, or would take the risks to be involved. If he were caught, it would mean immediate execution by the government. There would be no trial and no formalities. And," as he looked at Jonathan and *Tuyet*, he said softly, "whoever is behind this thing is using Triangle as the vehicle to purchase large chunks of some fairly large companies in most of the countries in this area. It's a perfect setup if you have the money behind you, and they do. And this organization was created during the war by the rogues, and it's all finally coming together."

Sloan turned his head quickly as former South Vietnamese Army General *Thrang* ran up to the veranda complaining bitterly.

"I'm supposed to set up defense perimeters, and those *Montagnards* do the reverse of what I've ordered, and..." he started laughing, "their way makes more sense, which is what really upsets me," he said wandering off to issue more useless orders.

The small group continued talking; Jonathan spoke to *Tong* several times; and General *Thrang* reappeared quickly, asking, "Who gave those guys automatic rifles?"

Quan turned around smiling.

"I gave them the guns. Don't worry. They know how to use them and far better than your guys did," he said turning back to listen to the others talking in between the phone calls.

Thrang threw up his hands in resignation and sat down to listen to the plans. The chief wandered in occasionally asking questions, which everyone answered in turn; then he would disappear until he returned with more questions.

At one point, the chief walked up on the veranda when everyone was eating, carrying one of his pets, a vice grip around his neck. Everyone panicked as he sat down at the table.

The normally calm general yelled and ran to the other side of the veranda. *Anh Phon* and *Tuyet* screamed and knocked over their food trying to leave the table.

Jonathan turned around shouting, "I'll shoot the creature, if you don't get him out of here."

Quan sat smiling as he had seen the chief pull that stunt once before, and he knew how effective it was for getting everybody's attention.

The chief stood up slowly, feeling the rejection of everyone, saying gently, "But I wanted to show you the biggest one we've caught," he said grinning with pride.

Jonathan turned quickly, an idea forming in his tired brain asking, "Can you keep him close by for a little surprise for our new friends who don't want to talk? In one hour, we'll go have a chat with them to see if they'll tell us where my friend Cairns is being held," he said laughing at the chief's expression as he bounced off the veranda, heading towards the guardhouse.

Jonathan yelled across the lawn, "Not now! Wait for us in one hour!"

As the chief disappeared across the lawn, all he heard was, "I know," and Jonathan started laughing as the general sat down beside him.

"What's so funny?" he asked.

"When the chief says 'I know,' that means he didn't understand a word I said, and he's going to interrogate the Americans with his little pet now."

Turning swiftly, Jonathan said, "Oh no!. I think we had better get over there quickly, or that snake will end up biting everyone of them."

The meal was forgotten as they ran towards the guardhouse as the chief entered. *Tuyet* caught up with Jonathan and grabbed his hand as they ran. They heard the screaming inside the small cottage as three other *Montagnards* entered, shutting the door behind them as crashing noise cascaded outside.

Jonathan jerked the door open and stopped quickly staring at a cobra pointed at his face, held in the vice grip of the little chief. *Tuyet* and Sloan slammed into Jonathan's back forcing him forward to where the snake's head was almost touching his nose.

"Get that creep out of my face!" he shouted at the grinning chief and jerked his head around when *Tuyet* screamed and tried to run out the door. Unfortunately, she was blocked by the general, who hadn't realized what was going on.

The prisoners in the small room were in hysteria, terrified that the *Montagnards* were going to let the monster loose among them. Jonathan inhaled deeply and held *Tuyet* to calm her. He looked at the chief and smiled, slowly calming down.

"Look, you little jackass," Jon chastised. "I didn't say now. I wanted to wait, but you didn't listen. You want to play with your little playmate. And you want to have fun."

"I listen and I no little jackass. I'm not a stupid animal. And you said we must question them. Now, we question and no waste time, and then you can go to bed with pretty *Tuyet*. It's time for that and no waste more time. Understand, you ungrateful young man," he said turning and laughing at the expression on Jonathan's face.

Jonathan stepped further into the room, and feeling a tug on his arm and turned around. *Tuyet* looked at him and smiled.

"He's right you know," she said. "Stop wasting time as I have plans for you and soon, but I'm out of here while he plays with that thing."

And she turned and walked out the door before Jonathan could say anything.

"All right, Elder Brother. How are you going to make them talk?"

"Easy," he said as he turned and walked over to the conscious wide-eyed wounded leader and put the snake's head six-inches from

his head. The man screamed and backed into the wall but found no place to escape.

"Now, you tell us where you have Australian, or I put my friend in your lousy shirt to sleep," the chief said laughing.

Two more *Montagnards* entered; the chief snapped an order, and they disappeared.

Jon turned quickly to Sloan and said, "I think you should probably follow *Tuyet* because it's going to get nasty, and they will get the answers."

"What are you talking about, my boy?" Sloan asked looking at the leader convulsing in pain.

As the chief rotated the snake between the prisoners and taunted them, their fear became greater, and the noise louder. Sloan stood by the door, prepared to leave quickly, but the intrigue held him inside. As he looked at Jon, he wondered how they were going to do it.

"They're bringing a few more surprises," Jon said softly, as if reading the general's mind, "so be prepared to leave if you can't handle the excitement." Suddenly, he was forced to step aside as the door flew open again.

Fifteen minutes later, they walked out of the room without the chief's pets. The door was locked, and the screams continued, but the interrogators now, thanks to their slimy friends, knew the location of Cairns, and they had a phone number to check out.

Sloan walked slowly across the lawns thinking, still astounded at how simple the interrogation went. He turned to Jonathan with a solemn look.

"I have never seen that trick nor would I have thought of it. Your friends are amazing, and when they mean business, they mean business, and they don't mess around. I think we should sit and talk a little and make plans for tomorrow. What time are the pilots ready?"

"At six o'clock. I'll call *Tong* in a moment to alert him, and he needs to stay out of sight. I'll ask him to get the old boys ready and start making plans."

They reached the veranda as *Tuyet* ran out, followed by *Quan* and *Anh Phon*, and threw her arms around Jonathan asking, "Are you all right?"

He looked at her closely and smiled. He felt that deep pain of wanting her race through his body and the need to be alone with her. He put his hand in her hair and brushed the strands as he leaned over and kissed her, then spoke as he felt the moisture flowing from his eyes.

"I'm okay, but there are a few unhappy crooks out there who now understand real fear. We need to sit and talk for a moment. Tomorrow morning *Quan* and I must leave to do some rescue work and track the mystery leaders of the cartel," he said as he turned slowly to hold her.

"You're protected here. *Thrang* will remain with the *Montagnards*. The chief will not let anything happen to you, believe me. No one will get near this place. Alexander, you must stay as well. There's nothing you can do in Saigon, and we need you as the line of communication to the governments.

They sat and talked and revised the plans. Jonathan phoned *Tong* and spoke for a long time, organizing things that needed to be coordinated. The old men would be there as soon as *Tong* contacted them, and the defenses would be set. As they finished the conversation, *Tong* said something and Jon looked around at the people he loved, and sadness flowed into his eyes.

He answered, "Yes, it is like the old days again. But this time, we're dealing with people who have no conscience. They're all crooks and peddlers of dope to innocent kids. And they are using the banking system to create a financial crisis in Asia for their own benefit simply to protect their main sources of drug supplies. The bankers they control are just as corrupt. We must find them," Jonathan finished angrily. He stopped for a moment, feeling the pressure from *Tuyet's* hand. When he continued talking, the calmness in his voice had returned.

"Get all the information that you can find about that banker from Hanoi and as soon as you can. Who were his parents? Where did he go to school? And how did he become so powerful in the govern-

ment? And put all the contacts on the search for Bernier and Tan. Also, the two missing CIA agents. The embassy will be of no help, and the names they're using will not be their real names."

They continued talking and everyone was getting tired. *Tuyet* kept her arms around her man, and he wanted to leave with her.

The chief ran up happily and said with a grin, "Time for bed," pointing his finger at the couple. "I've taken my pets away and put them in their special home in case we need them again," he said laughing. Those guys are still looking for the fang marks," he giggled as he walked away.

The chief stopped, turned around, and shouted. "Jonathan, take your lady to bed! I wake you up at five and that's six-hours from now, and you don't have much time! "And with that command, he ran off into the darkness.

Tuyet looked at Jonathan, saying, "I'm obeying the chief. What fang marks?" she asked as she stood up pulling Jonathan with her.

Sloan laughed and stood up slowly saying, feeling the tiredness in his body. "The cunning little jokers removed the cobras' fangs. The men went berserk when the cobras flared their hoods and danced in front of them with the deadly emerald eyes, and struck. I'm going to bed. Don't wake me, Jonathan," he said as he disappeared inside the villa with the couple following closely behind him.

JONATHAN AND *TUYET* UNDRESSED EACH OTHER slowly, watching each other, wanting to rush but needing to savor their first moment together. Their eyes followed each movement as clothes were discarded on the floor. They found comfort in being alone with each other for the first time as a couple. They kissed and held each other, and their passion for each other grew stronger as each moment passed. The whirlwinds breezed through their souls, as they lay on the bed side by side unsure of each other's passion. Jonathan gently touched and kissed *Tuyet* as a woman for the first time, and not as the little girl he rescued.

He kissed her with a demanding passion as she reached around his chest and pulled him to her tightly with a hunger that opened the

floodgates of their desire. She could no longer contain her desire for the man that she had waited so many years for. They moved together as one capturing the threshold of love as they floated in the clouds and mists, clinging to each other's body with passion.

Their hunger for each other was filled with joy as they made love to each other for the first time, committing to each other as one. Exhaustion overcame them several hours later and they held each other, not wanting to let go, afraid as they talked and made love again realizing that this was what the old lady had predicted all those years ago. They were meant for each other, the hunger of their spirit drove them to heights that neither had ever reached before with another person. The full moon cast its glow across the ocean and caressed them through the open window as the cool breeze cooled their skin.

They finally fell asleep murmuring to each other, longing to be alone as if it would be the last time; their arms wrapped around each other. As one rolled over the other followed, not wanting to lose the comfort of the other's body.

It seemed like only minutes when a rough hand grabbed his shoulder and shook him awake briskly. Jonathan snapped awake, ready to defend, but faced a grinning *Montagnard*. *Tuyet* woke up with the noise.

The chief chuckled and teased, "No time little lady for more enjoyment with him today. He must get ready now."

She reached for her pillow and threw it at the chief as he walked towards the door giggling.

Jon reached for her, and they kissed again, folding into each other's arms. The moment was on them, and they needed each other again. The door crashed open again, and a voice bellowed into the room.

"I told you to get ready my son, and now! And you stop disturbing his thoughts, *Tuyet*, or I send you away. Now get ready, Jonathan, but you can kiss her first, and I watch."

"I'll kill that clown from the highlands yet," Jonathan mumbled under his breath as he reached for her. They held each other for a long time and kissed, not wanting to be disturbed. At last, Jonathan stood

and walked towards the bathroom as the chief watched, and started laughing, pointing his finger at Jonathan. *Tuyet* yelled at the *Montagnard* and threw another pillow, as he ran out the door.

Jonathan and *Tuyet* walked on the veranda together holding each other closely. *Quan* and *Anh Phon* were there talking. The general couldn't sleep, and the entire villa was awake.

Jonathan looked at Sloan. "I thought you were going to sleep late!"

"I was but there was too much racket around the place," he said glancing at the chief.

Quan stood and said it was time to go and everyone walked to the car. The chief pointed to the ground covers telling them that his pets were asleep, but do not walk too close. As they got into the car, the chief looked at Jonathan, and spoke slowly, glancing at Sloan.

"We'll protect this family. Tell *Tong* to bring me some C4," he instructed turning quickly as General Sloan shouted in surprise.

"C4? What do you want that stuff for, and I didn't know you knew *Tong*."

"You think I'm crazy. Of course I know *Tong*, and don't ask me questions about why I want C4. I'm the chief," he said embracing Jonathan and walking away indignantly.

He stopped and shouted. "Tuyet, he will be all right! Kiss him quickly, and let them go to work. Alexander, you and I have things to do," he said to Sloan, as he mumbled under his breath, "He ask me too many questions."

Jonathan laughed at the expression on Sloan's face. "It's too early in the morning to argue with him. He's sincere, and he's taking it as his personal responsibility to protect you guys, and he will. I really don't know when he sleeps," he said as he kissed *Tuyet*.

Quan backed the car around and headed down the potholed road and disappeared around the bend, narrowly missing the damaged Range Rover stacked against a tree.

THE SMALL JET DESCENDED SLOWLY onto the tarmac at *Ton Sinh Nhat* Airport, the wheels touching down gently without dis-

turbing the two passengers. Jonathan hadn't spoken during the flight. *Quan* slept. Langston's mind stayed at the villa with *Tuyet*. He didn't want to leave her, but he knew they had to find and rescue Cairns. The next task was to break the cartel and find its leaders. They were now convinced there was more than one person involved at the top of the pile, and things were going to be tricky and deadly before it was over. As the small aircraft braked to a stop, Jonathan checked his weapon. He shook *Quan* gently, as the door opened.

They walked down the steps quickly, each carrying a briefcase, and ten minutes later they were speeding out of the airport with two cars following.

The taxi driver turned and said quickly as he watched the traffic buildup in the early hours, "We've been watching the place all night, Jon. No one has left it. *Tong* has our people posted all over the neighborhood. We can't go in shooting, or your friend will die."

"I know," Jonathan said sadly. "This is the way we're going to do it. It's the only way that I can see us getting near the place and having a slight chance of pulling Cairns out alive," he reasoned as he explained his idea.

Jonathan finally sat back and looked at *Quan*. "Are you ready?" he asked.

"Not a problem. We'll use a diversion that we used years ago in Cambodia," he said and as he started explaining, he watched the smile on Jonathan's face appear.

"We need to get back to the girls alive, so it had better work," he said laughing to release the tension, as they sped down the street; two other cars followed with the old boys from Saigon.

The two friends sat and thought about what was ahead. Suddenly, Jonathan was on the phone talking to *Tong*, making arrangements for the next phase to rescue Cairns. It was a plan that had gaps, and they needed to improvise as that went. And surprise was the absolute secret to its success.

Quan looked at Jonathan as he spoke to *Tong* understanding the variation of the ruse that they had used in Cambodia years ago. It was simple, but it had the signs of complications. Will they fall for the

simplicity of the plan, he wondered as the car wove its way through the early morning traffic. Jonathan finished his call to *Tong* and rang the estate and spoke to Alexander Sloan for five minutes, explaining what they were preparing and asking that the jet standby for a fast exit from Saigon. Timing was important, and the people needed to be in place for the plan to work.

"How is she, Al?" Jonathan asked, changing the topic at the end of the conversation, and was surprised when *Tuyet* spoke, her words coming in a rush. She had taken the cell phone away from the general before he could say anything further.

Jonathan laughed at the situation, wishing that he could be with her and to protect her; but he knew that they had to finish what was started or they would never be safe. They spoke and *Quan* listened, and smiled with the two people who had taken so long to be together, and who were desperately trying to make up for lost time.

Quan told the driver to slow down and park near the New World Hotel and wait. They had time, and it would take time for *Tong* to organize the pieces and players to the game. Nothing was to be left to chance, because they had only one chance of getting Cairns out alive, if he was still alive.

Jonathan finished talking with *Tuyet* and turned to face *Quan* as the car stopped. He looked around as the two other cars drove in front and parked, and the old men walked back to see what was going on. *Quan* explained quickly that they needed to wait for some people carrying things they needed to break into the house where the Australian was being held captive. *Tong* was organizing another chain to activate the plan, and just before they entered, Sloan and the chief would have the leader, being held captive in *Nha Trang* to phone, setting up a false trail.

"What if the bad guy don't want to talk?" asked one of the old men.

"He'll talk, or the chief has a pet waiting for him," *Quan* said laughing as the old man quivered at the thought and walked back to his car to wait with the others.

"*Quan*," Jonathan said slowly. "The general is not having a good day. First, the chief gives him orders, and he's following them, and then *Tuyet*'s taking the phone away from him to talk to me. I could hear the poor guy mumbling in the background about people having no respect for him. But he is really enjoying being a part of the crowd and no longer the upfront visible guy. He's contacting Reginald Sandhurst and putting him into the picture of Cairns' capture and our plans. And more than anything else, I think, he's upset that he's not with us."

The two friends continued developing their ideas, calling the old men over to discuss strategies that they understood from the military days. *Tong* rang twice to bring them up to date. They had two hours to go before they could make their move on the house and rescue Cairns.

Was he still alive? Jonathan wondered, as he sat and talked with *Quan*, watching the people, their bicycles loaded with merchandise heading for the local markets, pass the cars. Jonathan tried to send a mental message to Cairns. Hold on, my friend. We're coming to take you out of there. Get angry to give yourself more energy, but don't give up hope.

The cell phone rang again, and Jonathan spoke, listening to *Tong* realizing the urgency of their situation. They needed to move quickly, he explained to *Quan*. They decided to drive around the area and watch the house where Cairns was being held, to see if they saw anyone.

Tong's contacts had located Frank Tan and Serge Bernier and they were on the move. They were no longer in Saigon and on the way by air to *Nha Trang*. *Tong* has two men following them on the local flight, and he had already contacted the chief to put him into the picture.

"We were lucky that the two men were spotted at the airport as they rushed to board the flight at the last minute. *Tong*'s two men followed them on the flight and will keep him posted," Jonathan said looking at *Quan*, a worried look appearing on his face as he explained the conversation with *Tong*.

Images of *Tuyet* floated in his mind adding to his worries. He could see her smile, the dimple highlighting the sparkling blue eyes in her happiness. And he remembered the brief evening they had spent together encircled in love and the deep need to be with each other. He silently cursed himself for waiting too long, too many years before he had the courage to tell her that he loved her. He felt the fear rolling through his body, the fear of losing her if things went the wrong way.

He slowly turned and looked at *Quan* who sat quietly understanding his friend's mood, and said, "It's impossible for us to be in two places at the same time. *Tong* thinks there are other foreigners in the house with Cairns, but he can't be sure. We're going to walk around the back and through the alleys to see if we can pick up any signs of the people inside and locate any external defenses," he said motioning the driver to move.

They slowed and told the people in the two cars to follow at a discreet distance and explained what they were looking for.

Jonathan reached into his bag and pulled out a hat and two spare magazines of ammunition. Then he strapped a razor sharp hunting knife to his belt, a weapon so perfectly balanced that he could hit the target accurately at fifty feet.

Quan looked at him as he prepared himself, and said, "We only have about five minutes to go in and clear the area. When we're ready, the boys in the two cars will go in the front as if on official business, dressed in uniforms. Their backup team will appear in a blaze of noise as we go in the back doors. We have other people positioned to block any exit or escape route," he explained as the car slowed, and they continued around the block slowly looking at the streets and the Old French Colonial house ahead.

The phone rang, and Jonathan listened, turning to *Quan* as he put the phone next to him on the seat.

"The chief has sent some people to the airport in *Nha Trang*, and they'll try to be there when the flight arrives. They'll keep Bernier and Tan under surveillance, if they can make it on time. I'm almost sure that they have other people on the same flight or waiting for them in *Nha Trang*. The chief will let us know. Our jet is on its way to *Nha*

Trang with the chief's supplies, and it will return for us immediately. We need to get back there quickly. *Tong* is still tracking the mysterious leader and trying to learn how *Tiep* fits into this picture, if at all."

The car stopped on a small street two blocks from the house. *Quan* and Jonathan started walking down the street in the opposite direction, disappearing into an alleyway, as the car continued around the next corner to be in position to pick them up when they were ready.

The cool breeze floated in from the Saigon River relaxing them as they made their way down the alleyways, passing through shops asking questions to the people on the street. "Did they know the people living in the French house on *Tran Chu* Street? How many people live there? Were there any foreigners visiting the house?"

All the answers were the same. "No we don't know the people living there, and we haven't see any foreigners," until they asked an old lady selling fruits on the sidewalk sitting on her small stool, chewing her betel nut, her lips and gums red from years of chewing the relaxing potion.

"Yes, Elder Brother. There are two bad foreigners living there, and they are not the type of people that we want to have around us."

"Why do you say that, Elder Sister?" *Quan* asked politely.

"They are always impolite if I don't sell them the best fruits at the cheapest price. If I try to sell them what they think is inferior, they throw my fruit in the street, and then I can't sell them later. They are bad men, and I'm afraid of them. They pay the police to watch their house, and they have funny type of friends."

"What type of people do you mean, Elder Sister?"

"They have many ugly men coming to that house, and they all carry guns. Some police come, and they leave with packages of the white powder. I see this one-day when one policeman drops bag. He snarls at me and tells me to go away and tells me he would have me locked up if I say anything. I am afraid of the police who visit that house. There are six of them there now, Elder Brother, and something very bad is going on behind those doors."

"What do you mean, Elder Sister?" asked the tall man under the hat who spoke Vietnamese but was a foreigner.

The old lady looked up and smiled between her red gums at the young man who sat on the stool next to her. She turned to face *Quan* who was sitting next to her before speaking.

"Your friend is a foreigner, but he is polite and not like the bad devils from the house. Why are you interested in those men and that house?"

"Elder Sister," *Quan* said gently, "there will be trouble here soon and it would be safer for you if you left this area. Take your fruits, if you must, but you must leave. We'll give you money to cover your costs. Now, have you seen another foreigner there besides the mean ones?"

"Yes, the children saw a short man tied up and the other foreigners were beating him. They saw this when they looked in the windows last night searching for things to steal when these men leave, and we hope soon. Why are you interested?"

Quan looked at his watch and glanced at Jonathan realizing that they needed the last of the information and soon. They didn't have time to waste on the old woman.

"Elder Sister," *Quan* said softly, "did this short man have red hair?"

"Yes, Elder Brother. Those men were horrible to him. They keep punching him and yelling. My children heard all the noise, and they ran from the house, so they wouldn't be seen."

"Which room is he being held in?" asked *Quan*, looking towards the back of the house at the end of the alley.

The old lady turned slowly and stared in the direction of the house and pointed to the room at the corner, ten feet from the back door. She stood quickly and started putting her fruit into her baskets, as *Quan* handed her a bundle of Dong as compensation for lost business. She looked at him and smiled understanding that it was safer for her to be far away from this alley and fast.

As she started walking down the path on bent legs carrying her heavy load, *Quan* said to her gently, "Tell your children to forget rob-

bing this house today. It's not safe here and it will be very dangerous shortly. Tell the people close by to leave now before they are caught in something hazardous. No one should be near here, particularly if there are police involved and the dreaded white powder," he instructed as he stood and turned to look at Jonathan who was walking down the alleyway keeping close to the shadows of the walls.

Quan turned to look for the old woman, but she had disappeared down one of the many small alleys. She's not coming back today, he thought, as he trotted to catch up with Jonathan.

THE SKY WAS OVERCAST, and the breeze blew harder from the river. The two men walked down the alley staying close to the walls for protection and out of sight from the rear windows of the house. They stopped and looked at their watches, and the tall man reached for his cell phone and punched six numbers.

He spoke and then listened, and said before disconnecting. "In five minutes exactly, send them in, and make a lot of noise."

Jonathan reached for his cell phone and dialed a number in *Nha Trang*. When the chief answered, he told him to make the call to the house now, and to make sure that the mob leader was convincing. The chief had giggled on the other end, saying that the leader was convinced to talk now, as he had a playmate next to him and another with fangs waiting in a box ready to jump out. The men were ready, and he had men on the way to the airport to pick up the supplies when the jet landed in a few minutes.

Jonathan started laughing softly when he disconnected. He looked at *Quan* who asked, "What's so funny?"

"The chief's pets are making the leader call now. And he told us to hurry up here as *Tuyet* is being a nuisance constantly asking questions about us every five minutes."

"About us? I'm not included in those questions. Let's get moving, and stop wasting time thinking about her for the moment," he admonished, as they ran the last thirty feet through the alley, turning right to dash across the small space to the back of the house.

Slowly, they crept along the side until they were next to the window. Jonathan slowly looked inside, and saw Cairns bound to a chair. His head was slumped over, a man more dead than alive. Blood dripped from his swollen lips and lacerations showed on the side of his head. No one was in the room. They heard a phone ring from another part of the house, a few words spoken and then silence. Then someone started shouting in English, and they heard footsteps moving quickly towards the back of the house.

Jonathan drew his gun and walked towards the door, prepared for an attack. *Quan* eased himself around the corner to be in position. The back door opened slowly as a large Caucasian stood and shouted back into the house for the last time as the butt of a heavy gun hit the nerves at the base of his skull, and he collapsed. He would be out of action for a few hours and with a massive headache when he woke up.

Jonathan grabbed the man before he hit the steps and pulled him back inside the hallway. He motioned to *Quan*, as he disappeared inside the dimly lit hallway searching for other people.

He moved slowly, looking in all the rooms and opened the door cautiously to the room where Cairns was being held. He released the knob slowly as he heard the sirens blasting down the small street in front of the house. Shouts could be heard as people were running in the rooms in front.

Jonathan heard the fire trucks braking and men shouting on the outside, heading up onto the terrace, shouting instructions at each other. Men inside were shouting; "Get rid of the stuff, and someone get the man in the back." The shouting stopped as the door was broken in, and men charged inside.

Two men ran down the corridor, heading for the back room and charged inside going straight to Cairns. One man grabbed him brutally, and started jerking at the ropes as the other man turned to pick up some bags on the floor, then stopped, staring at a silenced .45 automatic touching his forehead.

The other man shouted, "Give me a hand to get this garbage out of here before the firemen arrive!"

He looked around to see Langston standing above him, aiming the automatic. Jonathan smiled, and the man holding Cairns screamed and collapsed as the automatic slammed against the side of neck. He tumbled and rolled screaming as the other man tried to stand, but the barrel crashed against the side of his skull.

Six men dressed in firemen uniforms rushed into the room, and retrieved the men's weapons and started dragging all three men to the front of the house. *Quan* ran inside from the back door and fired two silenced shots at two local policemen who were trying to escape through a window. They arched backwards and remained motionless on the floor, as *Quan* ran to the front, shouting orders at the older men dressed in firemen uniforms.

"Get these idiots into the cars quickly, and get out of here! We'll meet at the terminal. Make sure they're secure. The real police will be here in a few minutes, and they'll find the real police only with bundles of drugs and two abandoned fire trucks. Now, get moving!"

Quan ran to the back room, as Langston came out the door with Cairns draped over his shoulder, blood draining from his face from the cuts and lacerations. The man had been tortured severely. They ran down the alleyway, passing some of the local people who stared at the tall man carrying another man on his shoulders. They watched the foreigner followed by the Vietnamese and speculated softly but they wanted no involvement, deciding to gather their things and get out of the area.

Langston stumbled a few times with the weight on his shoulders but continued to the end of the alley. They turned the corner as their car braked to a stop, the driver holding the back door open. He sped away as soon as the door was shut.

Quan and Jonathan looked out the back window as they turned the corner onto the main street heading for *Ton Sinh Nhat* Airport. Two other cars and a van followed as they wove in and out of the heavy traffic. *Quan* spoke to the lead car as Jonathan dialed *Tong* and talked for five minutes explaining what had happened and what they needed to do quickly.

A doctor would be at the airport waiting to treat Cairns, and he would phone the chief to make sure that his men had protection set up when they arrived. Jonathan listened and quickly wrote a series of numbers and a few words down, handing the piece of paper to *Quan* who jerked his head around, letting out a slow whistle in disbelief.

CAIRNS MUTTERED INCOHERENTLY in his drug delirium. Langston and *Quan* spoke quietly as the car maneuvered through the traffic. They searched for flaws in *Tong*'s arguments, but found none. It was a one shot opportunity to force the leader of the drug cartel and the backers behind Triangle Bank into the open. It was a big gamble, and the odds were against them. If they failed, their lives would be worth little, and the entire reason for the foundation's creation would be lost in a fraction of time.

The drug lords and the Mafia would go after them with a vengeance until everyone was eliminated. They would have only two reasons for revenge and that was a secure supply base for the drugs and a safe means of financing the distribution through the banking system. How are we going to pull this off? *Quan* kept asking the question, and Jonathan had no answer.

Jonathan asked the driver to pull over and wait while they talked. The jet was thirty minutes from touchdown, and they needed time to think. Jonathan didn't want to talk to the general at the moment, without having a better idea of the next move. The ideas flowed between the two men supporting the lifeless body of the Australian ASIO agent in the backseat.

Jonathan turned to face *Quan* and said softly, "*Tong*'s idea is so simple that it scares me. His imagination has always surprised me, but are we missing a link to his real intention?"

Jonathan felt his stomach twisting as he toyed with the plan and finally said. "*Quan*, what do we have to lose except maybe our lives? We have the central bankers in our back pockets in all the other countries near here, except Vietnam. And the banking system in this country is so backwards, it not worth dealing with them," he said angrily sitting forward trying to ease his tension.

"Relax, Jon. *Tong* didn't say to do it today. He suggested it as a solution to flush the leader out, and I think it will work. It will drive the leader and anyone else depending on him mad. Now, let's think about it carefully and decide on which Central Bank is the best one to use. That's what *Tong* is really saying. We remove ourselves from any direct involvement by creating a mirror."

He sat back and watched Jonathan absorb what he had said. The thought had only surfaced as he was talking and the simplicity of *Tong*'s idea became clearer.

"All right, *Quan*. Let's go to the airport and have the doctor look at Cairns. He's alive, but he needs help quickly. We'll talk to the general when we are on the way to *Nha Trang*. You're right. There's no need to do anything today," he said as he motioned the car to continue. He looked back and saw the other cars pull out loaded with prisoners, all Caucasians, drug merchants, and gangsters, and they would talk or regret the day they lived.

FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, they stood near the cars in the seclusion of the Quonset hanger at the end of the airport waiting on the Lear Jet to arrive. Jonathan spoke to the general about *Tong*'s plan and the simplicity, and they decided to wait until later to activate. Jonathan phoned *Tong* through the Dalat exchange asking him to contact the governor of the Central Bank in Cambodia to have everything ready. Timing was the crucial element, and they needed to be in a position to react quickly.

When he finished talking, he looked at *Quan* and laughed, feeling the tension easing from his body.

"The heck with it. We're about ready to become bank robbers on a massive scale, but those people don't deserve the few hundred million they have stashed in the Triangle Bank accounts. Triangle has been the conduit for the entire operation, and now we're going after the whole thing. By the time this is over," he paused, "I really don't want to think about it for the moment," he said looking around at the doctor approaching them.

The doctor had completed his examination of Cairns.

"He'll be all right, but he's heavily sedated for a few hours. I'll travel with you, and keep him under observation."

"Is that necessary?" asked Jonathan looking at the agent sleeping deeply.

"No, it's not necessary as long as he's sleeping, but if he comes out in hysterics, he'll need quick attention. That's why I'm going with you," he said turning to smile at *Quan*. "Besides I don't have any option. *Tong* ordered me to stay with you and he's one person I don't wish to cross," he said as he turned and walked to the other cars to look at the injured men under guard.

Jonathan started laughing. He turned to face *Quan*. "We are really not running this show any longer. The two old guys have taken over and are telling us which way to jump. And we're doing exactly what they want," he said still laughing as *Quan* joined in.

Jonathan's cell phone rang. He answered and stopped, turned around quickly to face *Quan*, fear and shock written on his face as he listened. *Quan* could hear the voice on the other end, could understand the shouting voice of the general. *Quan's* anxiety level increased as he heard the meaning of the old soldier's words.

"*Tuyet* and *Anh Phon* are missing. They've been taken when they were shopping in town!"

Jonathan shouted into the phone. "And why were they in town on their own?"

The general revealed, "As it turned out, the girls persuaded the chief to let them go shopping, and he agreed reluctantly. He sent three of his men with them, but they had been taken out in a central shopping complex. Two of the chief's men were killed when they tried to stop the abduction of the two girls. The third man was in a nearby shop, and arrived too late to help."

"He went into a rage and chased the abductors down the main road as far as he could run. He described one of the abductors as European and blond. And he remembers the registration number of the car and the model. The chief had about twenty of the *Montagnards*, living in *Nha Trang*, scouring the entire district trying to locate them. They will be found, the chief swore when he heard the news,

and the abductors will die, if the girls are hurt in any way. He issued orders to his men that would be obeyed without questioning anything," finished Sloan.

Quan touched Jonathan's arm as he spoke to Alexander Sloan, a man who was having difficulties coming to grips with their reality at the moment.

Quan smiled and spoke softly telling him to pass the message. "Let's activate *Tong*'s plan now and force this thing into the open. We're going for broke," he said as he walked closer to where the doctor was standing with the prisoners. He pulled his gun from his jacket. Jonathan watched his friend of many years and understood, as he spoke to Sloan.

"Al, we're asking *Tong* to activate the breakdown of Triangle Bank starting this afternoon. The Cambodians will be the front, and we split the total amount between the Central Banks in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. We'll leak the news about Triangle's involvement in drug distribution and money laundering and add a little speculation about top level government involvement in Vietnam," he said, pausing to think. He heard Sloan's slow intake of breathe on the other end, and he realized the enormity of the gamble.

"And Al, the police informant has just told us that they found about 40 million dollar's worth of raw drugs in the house that we raided, and four of the six policemen captured were top level officials from the North. They'll probably be executed without a trial, and the government will probably make a public announcement at some point denying any involvement. This thing is heading North. I'll ask *Tong* to pull out all stops in locating the mysterious Mr. N. who is the leader that Bernier mentioned in Sydney. And Bernier and Tan are now in *Nha Trang* somewhere. They're the ones involved in the abduction of *Tuyet* and *Anh Phon*."

Langston listened to Sloan as he spoke, then said, "Al, tell the chief to set up the defenses like in the old days around the villa. He'll know what I mean. And you, my father, must stay at the villa to be our communication link. I'm going after Bernier, and he will die this

time," he promised, disconnecting quickly to avoid any arguments from Retired General Alexander Sloan.

Jonathan walked quickly to where *Quan* was standing with an automatic pointed at the tallest man's head captured earlier. He was shouting for *Quan* to stop, but the gun was jammed brutally into the man's eye socket and his back was against the wall with no place to move. The more he moved, the more severe the pain emanating from the metal barrel being twisted in *Quan*'s hand became.

Quan shouted with hatred written on his face as he applied more pressure and twisted.

"Where are the girls being held in *Nha Trang*?" he yelled shoving the metal deeper and twisting as the man screamed for him to stop, shouting that he didn't know anything.

Jonathan walked up, his automatic in his hand, shouting at *Quan* to stop.

"Leave me alone, Langston. I want information, or he dies here," he spat, turning abruptly to face the other two men who cowered against the wall.

Jonathan, without warning, grabbed *Quan*'s shoulder and jerked him backwards, shouting, "You can't kill these men. It'll ruin everything that you've tried to do here," he reminded, stopping slowly, and releasing his grip on *Quan*'s shoulder, glaring at his friend. As Jon put his gun in its holster, he pulled out the hunting knife.

He said, "But I can and I will. I have nothing to lose, and I don't care, and you do. Now, get out of my way!" he shouted louder. "They only have about five minutes before the jet arrives, and we'll put their dead carcasses on the plane and drop them out over land between here and *Nha Trang*. Now, out of my way, *Quan*, because they deserve to die," he said, wheeling on the man dressed in a suit, obviously the leader, who had said little, but who had watched carefully.

He cringed as Jonathan moved closer to him, twirling the razor sharp knife in his palm, balancing it into position. *Quan* shouted at Jonathan to think of stopping before it was too late.

Langston roared, "You started this *Quan*, and I want blood. They are involved in kidnapping the girls, and they will die," he said as he

kneeled in front of the well-dressed man who moved back as far as he could, his eyes darting in all directions, moving back to the blade.

Jonathan shouted, "Who's your leader? Where are the girls, and where are Bernier and Tan? You die, you piece of crap, if you don't answer."

The knife moved to the man's right ear, and he screamed as the top part of the ear dropped on his shoulder, the blade moving towards his chin, the point entering the flesh and moving slowly downward. The man continued to scream as blood rolled down onto his shirt and jacket. The two men beside him started yelling at him to talk.

Jonathan quickly changed positions, the knife on the shorter man's forehead, the edge of the blade making its way across the top; blood flowing as he screamed.

The old Vietnamese men from the war days, used to violence, stood and watched unsure of what they should be doing. In all the years of war, they had never witnessed a brutal torture as they saw in front of them at that moment. They wondered when it would end.

Quan turned slowly to face the older men and smiled, whispering softly to them that this was a trick they used in the old days, and it worked usually. If not, they deserved to die.

Langston shifted quickly to the taller man who mumbled and screamed for him to stop. The noise of the jet bounced off the walls of the hanger as it slowly made its approach, braking as the pilots stared down from the flight deck in disbelief at the scene below them. Blood flowing from the faces of the three men as Langston stood reversing the knife on the leader, starting a slow movement down the man's face as he screamed for him to stop. He would tell everything, if Langston would stop.

Jonathan stood slowly and commanded to the older men, "Clean them up quickly and put them on the aircraft." Turning to the leader, he shouted, "We're leaving now for *Nha Trang*. These men will be with us. You'll talk or you'll never arrive at the next airport," he said as he drove his shoe into the midsection of the tallest man who was trying to stand.

THE PILOTS STARED BELOW, as the three bloodied prisoners were loaded aboard the small aircraft. They counted the number of people coming on board and shrugged their shoulders. It was unimportant that they didn't have enough seats. They were getting use to breaking the rules. And they didn't want to know why Langston had attacked the men.

The pilot turned to his co-pilot as the rear door was closed and said, "I have a feeling it would be safer flying fighter jets than to cross Langston and *Quan*. We're involved in something that's deadly. And if it weren't for orders from the President, I would opt out of this job. Let's move," he said turning to face Langston who was standing behind him smiling.

Jonathan said softly, "You're probably right, but we don't have many choices. If you have weapons onboard, I suggest that you have them close by to protect this aircraft."

He turned as he heard the pilot's voice. "Okay Jon, we're set to fly. But close the door. You probably need to talk to those bad guys again and tell them not to yell too much."

Jonathan smiled at them, nodding his head and gave them instructions quickly telling them that if they heard noise, not to worry about it. He closed the flight deck door as the aircraft moved slowly across the apron.

The information that came out slowly at twenty thousand feet amazed them. The extent of the drug cartel's operations had never been disclosed in so much detail. The supply network in the Golden Triangle, reaching from Laos over into the central highlands of Vietnam was enormous. The distribution network out of the Triangle was well organized into the European and American markets supplying death to innocent young people and all financed by organized crime and protected by a few politicians in different countries. A few names of the protectors in the governments were disclosed and recorded as Jonathan kept pushing them for more details. When the men hesitated or became reluctant to talk, the knife appeared, and tongues wagged happily divulging more information.

The money laundering operations were through Triangle Bank, they knew, but nothing more. They didn't know the leader or who was behind the financing of the drugs. They were only part of the supply and distribution chains and had been for years when things became too hot, and they had left the CIA and stayed in Asia. They knew that two other men from the agency were still involved, but they had never met them. They only made contact with them through third party contacts, which was the way they preferred. The less that they knew about the agency's involvement, the better they were protected if things went wrong.

Quan and Langston listened and probed for more information. And each time that there was any hesitation, Langston's knife yielded more punishment, so they talked.

At one point, Jonathan walked up to the flight deck and asked, "How much flying time do we have before we need to land?"

"About three hours," said an astonished pilot.

"All right, take a scenic route for two hours so these guys can continue to talk and then we land. Phone the general, and tell him we're delayed talking with some unhappy gangsters. He'll understand and find out if there are any new developments from his end. We're making progress here but we need a little more time," he instructed as he shut the door and walked back to the three terrified Americans.

And they talked and every word was recorded as they stared at the little machine. When there was any hesitation, the knife convincingly came into action. Each man in turn talked about his involvement in the drug supply and distribution channels. And how they had been recruited during the war, and elected to stay on after the war, vanishing into Thailand until it was safe to return to Vietnam to expand the operations into the other countries.

Over the past five years, Saigon had become the base, the conduit through the rest of the world for the supplies. Some top government people in Hanoi were protecting them in Saigon, and they had no idea who the protectors were. They knew that the Southeast Asian organization was well-financed and controlled, and two rogue CIA Agents were at the top, but not in control.

The drugs came into Saigon via overland routes by small boats or trucks, crossing the safe borders where customs people were paid, and paid well, to look in the other direction. The drug shipment confiscated that morning had an uncut value of about forty million United States dollars and was due to be flown out that night aboard a US Air Force C-17 cargo flight.

The Air Force jet was bound for America, and the raw drugs had safe passage all the way to Dallas Air Force Base in Washington D.C. where the consignment would be picked up under Langley's clearance and delivered to upper state New York for processing and distribution.

"How is it that they can carry the drugs safely on a C-17, pray tell?" asked Langston in a loud voice, forcing the leader wearing the suit, blood dripping over the material, to face him.

"The drugs were to be concealed in the twenty coffins carrying the "missing in action" soldiers discovered recently by the 100 odd American soldiers searching all over the Vietnamese battlefields for MIAs. The search for MIAs is still providing safe passage for the cartel's drug supplies as long as we have the two men from Langley involved, and then we'll have to switch to the other option."

"It's the same scam that we set up and used during the war. Ship the uncut drugs with the dead bodies in body bags or coffins and no one would be the wiser. The American political pressures searching for MIAs still give us the safe passage. One hundred soldiers escort the remains of MIAs back to America safely protecting our drugs. After the flight lands at Dallas, the drugs miraculously disappear under the control of the agency people. We heard that they're on that flight tonight with other American civilian diplomats. We don't know them, and I doubt that they know that you have the drugs. They always remain out of the picture. We do the dirty work, and it's their safety zone to stay out of sight."

The leader stopped talking abruptly and looked at the other two men who were nodding their heads for him to continue.

"The American ambassador flew down this morning to have a press conference at the airbase tonight about the discovery of the

MIA. It's all political crap—this press conference. And it's only for satisfying the Washington politicians, and it's all bogus. No one really cares in Washington what's in those coffins. Tonight the jet was supposed to leave with twenty coffins with our drugs, and with only a few bones from twenty-five years ago. Now, I suppose you have the drugs."

Jonathan and *Quan* stared in disbelief as the man talked and as they realized the enormity of the drug operations flowing in and out of Saigon that was still protected in both countries.

"We don't have the drugs, but the real Vietnamese police do. Now what's the other option?" shouted Langston; his right lip curled up in anger remembering Bernier's telephone conversation in Sydney on Circular Quay.

The man looked at Langston and grinned, but stopped when he saw the knife move between the man's hands.

"Plan B is to be activated which carries the political protection of this government into France. We're to make our deliveries the same way, but couriers through a diplomatic consignment send the shipment. That's all that I know about Plan B. Bernier is to activate it on the next shipment in two weeks. He's the person with the connections," he finished, sitting back, easing the pressure on his back, and watching closely the reactions from the tall man sitting on the edge of the seat with a hunting knife in his hand.

The leader finally said in desperation, realizing that there was no longer a reason to hide anything.

"We're all expendable, dead if we step out of line, and we have no idea who issues the orders. And yes, we do know Serge Bernier and Frank Tan. They were part of the original organization, but over the years they stepped away from the control of the supply and distribution networks, and became the power base of the financing side of the cartel. But they're only the front men through their banks for the finance base through an unknown leader or organization. And they can't be trusted. They were in Saigon yesterday until they left to take care of unfinished business, they said. We have no idea where they are, and they're maniacs. And I can say that because I've known both

men for years," the tall man said, sitting back and asking for a drink of water.

Quan gave the men water and sat next to Jonathan as the recorder ran. Jonathan asked a question, not expecting an answer.

"Do you know a Vietnamese named: Nguyen *Thrang Tiep*?"

The three men looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders.

The taller man said quickly, "I only know what I've read about him. He's very high in the Vietnamese government in Hanoi, controls the banking system, and he's a spokesman for the government. I became interested in him a few years ago, and read a lot about him and his political aspirations. He's aiming for the presidency and general secretary of the party, but he's still considered too young, and his ideas are too radical to suit the old guard. No, he's not involved with the cartel or financing our racket, if that's what you're asking. He's too ambitious and wants to be at the top of the New Regime. He's protected and being gently pushed into that position by his mother who is already near the top as Vice Premier," he finished turning his head quickly hearing Jonathan's astounded voice.

"What did you just say?"

"His mother, who's grooming him to take over the top position when the time is right, protects *Tiep*. They're moving cautiously, and he's building his power base. None of this is said in the newspapers, but you pick it up by talking with the police and army officials involved with us," he explained, sitting back staring at the younger man in front of him, who two hours earlier had brutally tortured them to force them to talk. And they had talked, and now they needed protection from the men on this small aircraft, or they would die.

"Help us to bring this house of cards down," Jonathan said slowly, not sure why he said it. "And we'll make sure you're protected and with a new identity in another part of the world. We need to know more about this man named *Tiep*. He's not what he appears to be, and he speaks English with an American accent, and his eyes tell lies, like most politicians, but his are the worst that I've seen."

The tall man dressed in jeans and a cotton shirt reached up to scratch his head in pain with his injured arm, injuries inflict by an

expert who showed no feelings as the knife cut deeper. And this man had just offered them a way to live. He looked at his companions and assumed the leader's role from the man dressed in the business suit as he continued talking.

"I'm convinced that *Tiep* has nothing to do with the rackets or with us as he has too much to lose, and his political aspirations are guided by his mother who is a powerful person in the current government. But you're right. He speaks English with an American accent and that came from living in America as a young man and going to one of the best universities, Harvard, I believe. But his father is Australian and financed his American education. Find that man, and you'll find the backer behind the mother and son, if it's of interest to you," he suggested watching carefully the expression on Jonathan's and *Quan's* faces as he sat quietly.

"Are you sure that his father was not an American?" Langston asked carefully astounded by the revelation.

"That's what I've heard, and a few times. Whether it's true or not is up to you to find out, if you're that interested. Find *Tiep's* father, and you'll learn who's backing the son and mother. The only other thing I've heard is that this man was highly connected to the clandestine operations of the CIA before and during the war."

Jonathan stood slowly and walked down the short alleyway of the aircraft to the flight deck, opened the door and stepped inside, closing it.

He said simply to the pilot, "Get the general for me, please." He sat down in the jump seat. He needed information quickly, which the general could obtain through the political channels.

As he waited to be connected, he thought about *Tuyet* wondering where she was being held. The images of her smile and blue eyes leapt out from the clouds as the small jet glided its way through the atmosphere to a destination that was not clear to him. Hang in there, baby, he kept saying under his breath. I'm coming to save you and *Anh Phon*, my darling, and we'll get out of this game soon. I hate this life of violence and only want peace with you. Hang in there, as we need time together. I screwed up all those years by brushing aside my

true love for you. Cling to the one thing that we have together, and that is that I love you, and I'm coming to find you. And if they hurt you in any way, they will die.

"Jon, the general is on the line," the pilot said, gently realizing that the man's mind was far away. He handed the handset to Langston, returning to his electronic controls and punching a few numbers into the console as the small jet made a gradual turn to the East, heading for the coastline.

The pilot heard Jonathan's voice as he pronounced the death of two CIA Agency men leaving Saigon that night aboard an Air Force C-17 cargo jet. They had no idea what was waiting for them when they arrived at Dallas Air Force Base in Washington D.C.

The pilot disconnected his ear phones, as he didn't want to hear any more, because it was better to stay out of the problems involving Langston, the general, and the men in the back of his aircraft being tortured for information.

Langston spoke for awhile and listened to the other voice, then handed the handset back to the pilot.

Langston instructed the pilot, "Head for *Nha Trang*. Make sure this bird is refueled, and you two guys will remain on standby for a few quick trips if necessary. Sloan's phoning the President now, and you'll receive your clearance. We have some big problems, and the least you know, the better it is for you."

He heard the pilot's assurance as he closed the door. "Jon, we don't need to know, nor do we want to know."

AS JONATHAN SAT DOWN ON THE EDGE OF THE SEAT, the pilot's voice ricocheted urgently down the aisle, and hung in the air around the prisoners. One of the prisoners stared in disbelief when he heard the name, and shook his head slowly, fear appearing in his eyes.

"Mr. Langston. There's another call for you," he announced.

The astonished gangster watched the tall man stand and move slowly to the flight deck. Jonathan stopped and looked at the doctor and inquired about the patient.

"He'll be okay. He needs a lot of rest, and it will take days for the drugs to leave his body. He was really put to the test, and he's lucky to be alive. Don't worry. I'll look after him, or *Tong* will shoot me, figuratively speaking, of course."

Jonathan turned his head slowly and glanced at the man who was staring at him. The man turned his head suddenly and looked in the other direction quickly, too quickly.

Langston smiled at the doctor and continued towards the flight deck wondering about the prisoner's reaction when he had heard the pilot shout Langston's name. There was something about the man and he wanted to know the answers, but later.

The pilot handed the handset to Langston as he sat down in the jump seat, strapping himself in. He placed the handset over his ears and spoke to a familiar voice coming through the Dalat exchange. He laughed for a few moments and listened as his old friend gave him the news. He only interrupted *Tong* for clarification.

"Thanks," he said finally. "Keep the pressure on the governors of those central banks. They need to wrap up the confiscation of Triangle Bank's funds, and the funds from any of the companies it's controlling, by the close of business today. Make sure that they force Central Bank's branch in Saigon to fall in line. We're going for ground zero now and force these criminals out into the open," he instructed, pausing to look out the front window of the small aircraft buffeting its way through the low hanging clouds. When he spoke again to *Tong*, a final decision had been made.

"I'm going after *Tuyet* and *Anh Phon*. The chief thinks that he knows where they're being held, and he'll confirm by the time we land. Call Alexander, and keep him in the picture. He'll need to contact the President and a few prime ministers to keep them in the loop," he said, stopping to look at the pilots who stared out the front window, and occasionally at their instruments as the little jet glided its way through the air currents.

Finally, he said to *Tong* as he handed the handset back to the pilot, "The chief will meet us when we land with a few of his people. There's one man here that needs to talk more. He's holding something

back from us. And the President will arrange a reception party for the two CIA Agents on the C-17 when it arrives. They will have a few hard options to consider during their interrogation, and then they'll face a traffic accident in the field working for their government. I'll talk to you later."

Jonathan sat for a few moments thinking before he called *Quan* up to the flight deck. They sat and talked and considered the options and diversions needed when they went after the girls. Someone was going to die. As they felt the slow descent of the small jet towards *Nha Trang*, Jonathan looked at his friend and smiled.

He said, "When the Central Banks grab about five hundred million dollars in four countries this afternoon at four o'clock, I wonder how long it will take for the leader or leaders to surface?"

TWELVE

THE LITTLE SILVER BIRD STREAKED ITS WAY through the clouds, passing over the islands offshore from *Nha Trang*. The pilot had received prioritized landing clearance and adjusted the instruments to take them in before the civilian aircraft that had been told by unseen voices to circle the area for ten minutes before landing. The pilot finished one radio contact from Washington and looked at Jonathan and smiled.

"I don't know whose strings are being pulled, but you guys are really playing big time stuff," he said in between radio contact with the tower. "The President gave an order and there's another jet, bigger than this one, on its way with some CIA types and drug enforcement people. Diplomatic pressures have started, and the old man in the White House is mad that Americans are so involved. And we are being ordered to follow your instructions without question. Now, let's get this bird down on the runway without hitting any other flying birds."

"What birds?" Jonathan asked laughing.

"Birds around airports and especially near water are one of the biggest hazards facing a pilot anywhere. You should know that," he said peering out the front window.

"Joseph, my friend, you don't have to worry about birds in Vietnam. The Vietnamese eat them. There have been no birds around this

country for years. They'll eat anything that crawls, walks or flies, so don't worry," he said laughing, as the tarmac pulled closer, and the nose lifted for touchdown.

The noise of the small aircraft vibrated through the enclosed structure of the Quonset hanger at the far end of the airport. Old abandoned American military aircraft were parked haphazardly around the field, parts missing, and the strains of combat from years ago showing on the outer layers of the small planes. The pilot shut the engines as the co-pilot moved to the back to open the door.

Jonathan stood slowly, watching the prisoner who was avoiding eye contact, as he helped the doctor take a heavily sedated Cairns off the aircraft first. A dozen little brown hands reached for the unconscious man and gently picked him up and carried him to a waiting van at the other end of the hanger.

The chief walked up to Jonathan and embraced him, looking at him and casting his eyes down.

"I'm sorry, my son. I failed to protect the girls."

"Chief, we'll find them, and if they're harmed, we both know what has to occur. It happened, and they were taken. They want me, and they want the information that I have. Tonight, we'll have something to bargain with, and the leader will surface if he doesn't want to lose millions. Let's not waste time," he said turning to look at the prisoners as they walked into the hanger area from the aircraft.

Jon turned to look at his friend, speaking gently, understanding that the man had taken the lapse in his protection of the women personally.

"We'll find the girls. Those men are to go back to the villa and be locked up with the others. There's one man that we need to talk to now, if you have one or two of your little devils with you. He's holding back some information, and I want to know what it is," he indicated, turning to point at the shorter man, who walked behind the others, averting his eyes from the tall foreigner.

The chief shouted at his men, pointed his wrinkled forefinger at the man, and shouted instructions. The little *Montagnards* scrambled,

and a flurry of activity surrounded the prisoners as they herded them to the far side of the hanger.

The pilots sat in their seats on the flight deck doing their last minute instrument checks, and looking down at the sudden activity, mesmerized at the speed that the little men moved with the prisoners.

Cairns was loaded into a van with the doctor, and it sped out of the hanger leaving drifts of blue smoke curling in the confined space. The pilots watched as the prisoners were told to sit on the edge of the hanger against the wall.

One of the *Montagnards* quickly grabbed the shorter man who was trying to shake the little brown hands from his body. They pulled at him brutally and sat him about ten feet in front of the other men and slowly formed a circle around him smiling.

Jonathan and *Quan* walked slowly over towards the man, who was turning his head rapidly, fear written on his face wondering why he had been singled out from the other two colleagues. The pilots watched from their protective enclosure deciding it was safer to stay on the aircraft for the moment.

The chief walked up behind Jonathan and *Quan* carrying three large canvas bags that appeared to be moving in his dangling hands. He placed two bags in front of the man, turned and walked over to the other two men, and smiled as he set the moving material in front of them. He looked at them, saying quickly.

"Your friend will talk, and if he doesn't you will," he said, turning to walk quickly towards the single man who was sweating, staring at the two bags and watching the shape of the material change angrily.

Jonathan stood in front of the man, staring down at him and smiling. The pilots watched from the aircraft, and the other two prisoners stared at the sack in front of them, their eyes fixed on the brown material, wondering.

"Why have you been staring at me?" shouted Langston.

"I don't know what you're talking about. We've told you everything we know. What is this all about?" shouted the man turning his head abruptly to his friends. "Tell this idiot that I don't know anything else!" he yelled turning his eyes quickly toward Langston.

"But I think you do. When the pilot called my name on the aircraft, you showed a big interest that you tried to conceal. I want to know why. Do you know me from somewhere?"

The man looked around nervously, wanting to talk but not sure what to say. The chief walked over to the man and knelt down next to the canvas sacks and looked at him smiling, his missing teeth dominating his grin. He was enjoying himself as he reached for the nearest bag and started slowly to untie the rope at the top. The sides of the sack jumped furiously, and the man screamed for him to stop, realizing that certain death was ready to jump out. The chief's hands slowed, and he smiled at the man, and spoke abruptly.

"You tell Jon what he wants to know, or my big friend here will have a feast. Now, talk quickly, because my hands are restless."

"Okay, but get those things away from me now."

The short gangster started talking, his words clipped in fear, as he stared at the bags in front of him. He stopped only to catch his breath, occasionally looking at the other two men. One of the *Montagnards* came over and grabbed one of the sacks and placed it in front of the other men and kneeled down, staring at them with a wicked grin. They pushed themselves further against the wall trying to push the wall backward for more distance from the moving bags.

As the shorter man in the center of the hanger spoke, the words came out nervously; sweat poured from his face; and Jonathan's anger soared as the story of his brother's death unfolded. The man had known Denis Langston and had tried to recruit him into the drug distribution network on the military base, but the young man had balked, refusing to have anything to do with them. He had called them rogues and threatened to turn them in to the military high command.

But young Denis Langston didn't know that the colonel that he spoke to about the drug distribution network was part of the operation. The colonel had listened and was surprised at the extent of the young man's knowledge of the network. When he relayed the conversation to the rogue CIA operatives, a decision was made quickly.

Denis Langston was to be killed. He could no longer be trusted, and an example was to be made of the young man to anyone else

wanting to divulge information of the distribution network. Little did the colonel know that Denis had a brother working in Saigon. The brother had already made inroads into the mechanisms of the cartel through a man who was very high in the military command and who was determined to crush the drug operation. Alexander Sloan had made the connection between the names of the young man who worked covertly with him and the younger man who had died of a massive overdose of heroin. The stories flowed rapidly through the ranks of the military. Don't cross the cartel, and don't divulge any information to outsiders about the drug operations.

The man in the hanger, on orders from the two men sitting on a C-17 heading for Washington at this very moment, had reluctantly administered Denis Langston's overdose. When Jonathan Langston learned of his brother's death, he was enraged never believing that his brother was a drug addict. But experts had planted the evidence, and the word passed around the military establishment. Don't cross the cartel controlled by the CIA and military high command. Death was the reward for divulging information about the drug distribution network.

Jonathan Langston swore revenge but listened to General Alexander Sloan who convinced him that the long-term plan for attacking the parasites of society was more important. Sloan had shouted at Jonathan when the young man was set to go after the killers, "Use your brother's death as a means of destroying the cartel. We need time and money to find and to destroy the leaders and the network."

Twenty years later, Jonathan stood looking down at the man who had injected his brother with the lethal dose of drugs. And he felt the hatred slowly boiling, ready to burst out of the pores of his skin. He turned to face the little *Montagnard* who was watching the younger man closely. The chief finally smiled slowly, understanding the man's emotions, and touching Jon gently before speaking.

"Jon, there's no need to kill him now. We'll need him later. He killed your brother but he acted on orders from others. They are the ones who must be punished. Use this man to find the girls tonight, and then kill him if it's necessary. Think, my young friend, as we

need all the help possible. This man will help us, or he will die before we leave this airport," he finished and then turned quickly to look at the short prisoner, who was rubbing the sweat from his face. He had heard every word said by the little brown man in front of him holding a quivering canvas bag.

Jonathan looked carefully at the man he respected. He smiled, slowly letting his anger subside, understanding that killing the man served no purpose, at the moment.

He slowly asked the chief, "Do you know where the girls are being held?"

"Yes, but there's nothing that we can do before tonight. It's better that way. Al agrees as I spoke to him just before you arrived. We have about three hours to prepare, and then we'll go into the fortress at the villa on the bluff overlooking the islands. My men are already preparing, and some of them are already there working around the grounds as peasants," he said laughing at some unseen joke.

TUYET AND ANH PHON stood in a room looking at the ocean in the distance. They had freedom to move around in the large room, but it was impossible to leave. Two men stood outside the door armed, and occasionally they looked in, but mostly they left them alone. *Tuyet* had tried to talk to them, to find out why they were being held captive, but there was no response from the westerners.

As the door closed behind the two guards, *Anh Phon* said in desperation, "Where are those two men of ours? We're being held to force them to come after us. Do you remember, *Tuyet*, the tall blond Frenchmen who forced us into the car?

"Yes, he's the man Jon's been tracking for many years, a man involved in setting up the drug cartel, a killer. He must be the one that *Quan* shot in Sydney. But why is he here in *Nha Trang*? And who is the other man?"

"I don't know, and they're using us as bait. They don't realize that the *Montagnards* will be looking for us, and they'll kill anyone that hurts us. The blond man is using us to force Jon into the open. Where are they?" she shouted feeling the tension flow through her body.

Tuyet realized that it had taken so many years for her and Jon to be together finally, and it was all about to end. If Jon or *Quan* made the wrong move, she and *Anh Phon* were expendable and would be killed, sacrificed in revenge by the leaders of the cartel. She wondered how many men were protecting this place.

They could hear the noise and activity around the grounds. Occasionally, they saw the tall blond man walking around the grounds with another Eurasian-looking man. The other man appeared to be in charge. He stood arrogantly and gave the orders; each command was punctuated by a finger pointed at the chest of the tall blond man whose arm was in a sling. Guards would appear, listen, and disappear quickly, as the Eurasian gave his instructions. The blond man listened but didn't interfere. What was his name? *Tuyet* kept asking herself. A name from years ago, or was it two names?

Tuyet felt her anxiety surfacing in her chest, the feeling of losing someone she was close to being with, that he was being snatched from her life. She remembered Jon's words, from many years ago, for dealing with these feelings: "Get angry and let yourself feel the passion of it. Let the rage be directed at the person or object that's making you uncomfortable. Make the anger work for you and not against you."

She turned quickly from the window and said to *Anh Phon*, "We need to plan our escape."

She started pacing the floor in deep thought.

"I think I know this place," *Tuyet* said harshly spinning around in a circle letting her fury boil. "And we must assume that Jon and *Quan* will not find us, and these people will start torturing us for information that we don't have. We also need to assume that they know that their other men are being held captive at the villa or somewhere. Now, here's what we need to do when the guards come to check on us again."

Tuyet started talking as she looked around the room; searching for concealed eyes and ears to their muted conversation. She was looking for camera eyes or concealed bugs that would transmit their voices to unseen listeners.

They stood near the windows and watched men move around the grounds below. The windows were bolted, leaving any possibility of escape futile. But there was always hope. *Tuyet* looked around the room again at the ornate French designed furnishings from decades ago, but still appropriate for décor. In the distance, she saw other French style buildings in the same complex, nestled in the coconut groves dotting the estate. The breeze coming in from the ocean flowed gently through the branches of the swaying trees, the colorful butterflies bouncing from one flower to the next, then floating away gently on the air currents.

Tuyet stopped pacing in front of the window and quickly tapped *Anh Phon* on the shoulder pointing at the gardeners at the lower end of the garden. They looked at each other and smiled, feeling the relief flowing through their bodies. Help was close by. But how would they reach them or send them a signal?

Tuyet felt the urge to jump and pound on the glass to catch their attention, but realized that it was too dangerous. She paced again in front of the window asking *Anh Phon* to follow her example. They stopped at intervals and looked down at the gardeners who worked slowly while looking around the grounds. One older man walked over to the edge of the footpath to pick up some tools, stooped over and glanced up at the building slowly, his eyes roving the structure taking in everything.

As the Vietnamese gardener stood, his eyes moved to the second floor window where the girls stood. He turned slowly to say something to three other gardeners who were watching him. Their eyes followed his gaze. The older man turned to face the window again and smiled, then turned quickly and walked down the slope. As he passed his two companions, he handed them the tools, and spoke momentarily before disappearing down a lane heading for the next building. The gardeners bent over and started working, occasionally glancing up at the window. But the girls had disappeared from view.

THE CLOUDS ABOVE THE ESTATE were casting an eerie glow on the grounds as they moved slowly out to sea. The sun was gradu-

ally falling to the surface of the ocean in the distance as it found its resting-place for the evening. Lights were being turned on in the buildings around the compound, and the Vietnamese workers were slowly picking up equipment no longer needed for the day's chores. The day was over; the work done, and they had earned their dollar for a twelve-hour job. Home to family or off to visit friends was the only preoccupation on their minds. Only the foreign guards walked around the huge mansion on the outskirts of *Nha Trang*.

Everyone had left the area, except for four workers who took their time gathering equipment. They lingered and waited in the shadows and were soon joined by four other men carrying heavy bags loaded with other equipment. European guards wandered around the drive-way surrounding the huge house on the hill, but they ignored the men far below. The local peasants were unimportant to them. Their job was simple. Protect the leaders inside the house from outsiders and make sure that the two women did not escape or were rescued. Each guard was heavily armed as they patrolled the grounds. They kept looking for people that were not to be seen. But they didn't notice the obvious roving eyes from below.

The protectors of the estate were being monitored by the best in the country. The most feared guerrilla strategists in the nation were standing in their back yard, and they didn't know it. The older leader quickly issued instructions, and five men disappeared from sight carrying their bags loaded with destruction.

He smiled at one of the other men, and picked up a bag gently and said, "Let us plant a few bang-bangs like in the old days. These people need to learn quickly that the hill people are not to be killed when protecting the chief's friends."

He lifted the smaller bag and tossed it to his companion. The younger man grabbed the bag in mid air and smiled, reaching inside and retrieving eight detonators for the C-4 explosives.

He looked at the older *Montagnard* and asked, "Where are we going to set the charges?"

The man smiled and pointed at four locations surrounding the huge colonial structure, and turned abruptly looking at the flash of

lights coming up the long drive; dogs barking in the distance at the sudden intrusion of two cars pulling into the circular drive in front of the mansion.

"Quick! We need to plant this stuff, but in such a way that the girls will not be hurt when they go bang. We'll do nothing until the chief or Jon gives the word. We need to be ready. The other men will be setting up a defense now at the villa, and nothing will get near the general, as he'll be behind a C-4 firewall. Let's move and start planning for *Tuyet's* and *Anh Phon's* rescue," he instructed, disappearing up the hill with his companion heading in the opposite direction, the darkness closing on their bodies as they slid silently into the vegetation on the hill.

Tuyet walked to the window and looked down into the shadows of the huge garden and saw the *Montagnards'* shadows as they scattered in the opposite direction. She turned slowly and smiled at *Anh Phon*, her blue eyes sparkling with relief and fear, realizing what was ahead of them.

She walked over to her friend and said softly, watching the door that concealed the two guards outside, "The *Montagnards* are setting up something outside, and we need to be prepared for any type of attack. Remember the days so many years ago when Jon and *Quan* used explosives to save our necks when we were almost boxed in by the Vietcong?"

"Yes, and it was frightening, until we crawled out of the building and escaped on the boats. They blasted the building when the soldiers charged inside for the kill. I don't like thinking about those days. Do you think they're planning the same type of tactic?"

"I really don't know, but the little guerillas are up to something. They're smart, and they're here to rescue us and destroy as much as possible. We need to be prepared for a diversion, because when the attack comes, those guards will be coming in to take us out. They need us to get at Jon and *Quan*," *Tuyet* said sadly as she leaned to hug her elder sister.

"Jon and I were so close to being together, and now we're in this mess. Come, we need to look for anything that we can use as a

weapon. Think, darn it," *Tuyet* shouted at her friend. "What did they teach us during the escape so many years ago? Always use the simplest thing, and it will become your weapon, and it will save your life," she said emphatically releasing her friend and stepping back.

Tuyet started wandering around the large room quickly, her eyes roaming over every object in the room. *Anh Phon* searched in the opposite direction. *Tuyet*'s eyes stopped, and she stooped over to pick an object.

She smiled and screamed, as the door slammed open, the wooden frame bouncing off the wall as the two guards rushed in with their weapons drawn. One guard grabbed *Anh Phon* brutally by her hair and pulled her rapidly towards the door, unconcerned as the woman screamed for him to stop, tripping over her feet several times as he jerked her forward.

Tuyet tried to run, but screamed as a huge hand grabbed her dark hair and yanked with such force that she was jerked off her feet backwards, her head slamming onto the marble floor. She screamed again, and the weapon that she discovered fell heavily to the floor, and she felt herself being dragged brutally to the door before she lost footing and fell. She was picked up brutally and shoved out the door. The men pushed the women harshly against the wall, turned, and closed the door. The brute with a New York accent leered at them and shouted for them to walk in front, or they would be dragged the rest of the way.

Tuyet tried to gather her thoughts as she stood awkwardly. She reached over to hold *Anh Phon*, watching the men carefully. The shorter of the two men grabbed *Anh Phon* and shoved her down the hallway. *Tuyet* followed her, trying to catch her before she fell, and she felt the palm of the brute being shoved into her back, as she reached for the Vietnamese woman.

They were lead into a huge room with a dangling chandelier left over from the Colonial occupation. Half of the light bulbs were missing casting an eerie glow over the room. In the corner, stood two men who stared at the women supporting each other in the doorway. *Tuyet* gasped, as she recognized the enemy from years ago in Vientiane,

when he was ready to rape her, and Jonathan had returned earlier than he expected and saved her again from a degrading humiliation. The tall blond man with his arm in a sling smiled; his eyes mocked her as he turned to the other tall Eurasian man.

"She recognizes me after all these years. I almost had a bit of her nice body then, but her boyfriend returned home too soon, and I had to dive out of the window into the river without the pleasure. Maybe this time I can finish without any interference," he sneered turning to walk towards the girls. Abruptly, he was stopped by a deep, angry voice behind him.

"There won't be a next time, Serge, if you keep up this crap. You're to keep your hands off the girls. We have questions for them, and they will answer, or they die. I really don't care about your pleasures or what you want to do. You've already given us enough problems. You goof up one more time, and you're a dead man. We really don't need you any longer, except to activate Plan B. Once that's done, you're expendable, like the rest of us. Do I make myself understood?" he shouted walking over to stand in front of the man with a French accent, glaring into his eyes.

"Do you understand me, Serge? We don't need you if you continue this nonsense. Mr. N. will be here shortly, and we need answers for him. We need to be prepared for Langston, because he will come after the broads. The guy's a maniac, and he will destroy us, if we don't watch it. Get on the phone now, and check with the bank in Saigon, and see if they're prepared for the transfers over the next few days. We need the next big shipment before we activate the next phase," he instructed, turning slowly to look at the two women who the two guards were shoving into two seats next to the window. The men walked over to the huge window overlooking the gardens below and waited as the Eurasian turned to face the blond man called Serge. They didn't like the undercurrent in the room, but their instructions came from the tall Eurasian and not the Frenchman, and they would kill him if they were told to pull the trigger.

Frank Tan clinched his hands next to his legs and spoke harshly to Bernier, his anger coming under control as he glanced slowly around the room.

"The guards are patrolling the grounds, and we're safe. Mr. N will arrive tonight on a private jet from Hanoi, and we'll talk with these women and make the final plans for the next few days. Mr. N told me that his old man is on his way here, and he wants all the plans in place. N needs to be protected and also the old man, as he's the only link between the agencies in America and Europe supplying the Mafia. We have their money in Triangle Bank now, but they don't have the big shipments for distribution. God help us, if we make another mistake like this afternoon when we lost Cairns to Langston. That's all we know at the moment, and Mr. N is hopping mad. We can only hope that a large cache full of raw drugs made it on the C-17 for delivery in the States tomorrow. The two guys on the plane will let us know in about fifteen hours when they arrive. We won't be able to contact them until then. Langston needs to be found and killed after we have all the information he's carrying. We need to protect our drugs and find out who's behind Langston. He's not on his own. Get your people working now, and don't make any mistakes, or you're dead as I'll be. But before I die, I'll pull the trigger on you first. Now, get your butt moving, and don't even think about harming those women until we decide," he commanded, turning quickly to face the two women who were staring in their direction, before he walked to the door.

"When we have what we want, and Langston's dead, you can do what you want with them, but not before."

TWO LATE MODEL CARS PULLED UP into the circular drive in front of the beige colored mansion and braked sharply. The doors opened rapidly in the front car as the driver and occupant stepped out together. The well-dressed man waved the driver away and spoke harshly to him, turned and walked up the steps without looking back. He was a man used to power, and he was in a hurry. The driver stared at the slim man with a short-cropped haircut for a few moments. He

backed the car around, facing it toward the front of the drive in preparation for a quick exit when the man was ready to leave.

The other car turned around and parked next to the first car. The passenger door opened, and a tall Vietnamese man dressed in a blue policeman's uniform stepped out and walked over to the car.

He asked quickly, "How long are we going to be here? I really don't have time to waste on the northerners, even if they are senior party members. They come down here expecting us to jump every time, and then they go back to Hanoi and complain that we don't do any work. We're fed up with their mouthing off, and I don't care who he is."

"I don't know," the driver said cautiously realizing that if he said the wrong word to the wrong person, he ran the risk of losing his cushy job.

"He must have said something, you imbecile," the man of authority said brusquely.

"He did. He told me to wait until he was ready to leave and to tell you people to wait with me. You're here only because the party requires it. And he's an important man in the government, and that status requires your presence. He's not a very happy man about being here and in contact with so many foreigners. Coming over here, he kept shouting angrily into his cell phone, in that foreign language that he speaks so well. He doesn't know that I speak the tongue. All he said was that we must wait, and when he returns, we're to go straight to the airport and return to Hanoi," he said, pausing before he continued, and thinking slowly, as he spoke.

"He did say that you're not to be concerned about some foreigners walking around this place, if we saw them. They're guards for the people he came to see. We're to say nothing and do nothing if, they come near us," the driver said as he pulled the door shut, pushing the lock down on the frustrated policeman who had two epaulettes on his shoulders.

The policeman in his blue uniform stared at the driver in the front seat of a locked car and felt his anger rising. He wanted to break the window, haul the fool out, and arrest him for any excuse, but he real-

ized that would be the wrong move. He turned quickly and walked back to his car, got in, and picked up his cell phone. He instructed his driver to take a walk as he spoke to a senior colleague in Saigon, who had told him on party instructions, to accompany the man in the mansion.

As the voice from Saigon spoke, he smiled. Rewards were ahead of him, if he stayed cool and followed a plan coming out of the police headquarters in Saigon. The senior cadre in the South hated the party man from Hanoi. The man was brutal and would have anyone opposing him executed, or the opposition would simply disappear.

Drugs had been confiscated that afternoon on a police raid on a house full of rogue northern policemen, and it was suspected that this man was involved somehow. The senior policeman in *Nha Trang* was told to continue with the charade and report everything he could learn about the northerner and the foreigners in the mansion.

Unknown to the *Nha Trang* policeman, when he terminated the call to Saigon, his senior colleague dialed a number through the Dalat exchange and spoke at length to *Tong* who sat and rubbed his hands in glee at the news.

When they finished talking, *Tong* dialed a cell number, and Jonathan Langston heard the familiar laugh when he answered. As he listened, he visualized the old man stroking his long beard as he spoke.

JONATHAN LANGSTON FINISHED THE PHONE CALL with *Tong*, spun around, and looked at the three prisoners sitting in front of the *Montagnards* holding the canvas bags. He glanced at the old *Montagnard* standing next to him.

"Time to move. Chief," said Jon. "the leader is at the mansion on the coast. Do you have your men in position over there and the defenses set up?"

"Yes, of course."

"Good. We're going in tonight and free the women. If they're harmed in any way, there will be a few bodies floating in the ocean below. *Tong* has some news for us. He has a few of the senior police officials in his back pocket, and they're feeding him information.

Tong's going to do a trade-off for their help and cover. Part of the money from Triangle Bank in Saigon will be funneled off to the Saigon secret police fund set up to help the orphans of veterans."

"What do you want to do with those men?" the chief asked pointing at the gangsters staring at the wriggling bags in front of them.

"Bring them along. We'll use them as worthless bait. Bring your pets with you, and we'll find a home for them. How are your people set up over there?"

"They've laid the C4 at the back exits and on the drive coming in. There are two cars caught inside, one car carried some short guy who's apparently very important."

Jonathan thought for a few minutes staring at the men sitting on the floor, then turned and motioned to *Quan*. He quickly explained *Tong's* news and watched his friend smile. *Tong* was contacting the senior policeman in *Nha Trang*, through Saigon, ordering him outside the perimeter and warning him of the *Montagnards'* plans.

The chief turned quickly and spoke to his men in their dialect, not wanting any confusion. Jonathan and *Quan* walked quickly to the waiting car as Jonathan phoned the general to let him know their plans. They spoke and when Jonathan disconnected, he turned to face *Quan*.

"The C-17 will arrive at Dallas Air Force Base soon, and the two CIA Agents will disappear for some serious talks. I doubt if they'll come out alive. They know the rules. The President has issued the orders, and the Director of the CIA is one mad individual about the deception. Sloan has tried to contact Sandhurst in Australia, but the super sleuth is on an undisclosed mission in Asia," Langston continued explaining.

"The general finally spoke to McCord in Sydney, and they're raiding all the drug lords, and the government has control of all the funds from Triangle Bank held with Australian Bank and East Coast Bank. They now have about four billion in the government's coffers until this thing sorts itself out. For some reason, Sandhurst left quickly on an undisclosed assignment when he was needed as the backup in ASIO."

"Sloan phoned the Prime Minister to bring him up to date and to find out what's happened in Japan to the bankers."

Jonathan stopped talking to answer his cell phone. He listened and wrote something on a piece of paper. He disconnected and shouted out the window. The chief ran over quickly and climbed into the front seat, turning to look at the two friends in the back smiling.

"Chief, we need your pets. The front car is to be allowed out of the area as it carries some friends of *Tong*, and they're not in this equation. They're being warned now. Tell your people to be ready for our arrival, and put your pets in the back of the car. They're going to earn their living tonight. The mysterious Mr. N is at the mansion now, and we need to bargain with him," he said as he reached for his cell phone, looked at the number on the paper, and punched the numbers for the Hanoi exchange.

THE CELL PHONE RANG AT THE MANSION startling the well-dressed man, who was standing in front of Frank Tan and Serge Bernier, shouting at them furiously. His anger was so pronounced that he was shaking. The sharp American twang was out of place coming from the face of an Asian. The sound of the phone was a nuisance, an irritation as he shouted at the men. He had left orders to his people not to phone him and not to relay any messages unless it was absolutely urgent. But this was Vietnam, and he was a senior party official, and his council was being sought.

He took the cell phone from his pocket, looked over in the direction of the women, and sneered at them in distaste thinking that they would be dead before the night was over.

The news that Bernier had given him from the banks had shaken him. Millions of dollars had disappeared that afternoon, confiscated by the central banks in three other countries that he couldn't control. Who had issued orders to close the accounts? he wondered, as he punched the wrong number disconnecting the caller.

He turned quickly in agitation, shoving the small cell phone in his pocket, while feeling his anger rising. He needed to talk to the real leader of the cartel, and soon. He was a man who was ruthless and

unknown to any of these clowns in front of him. They thought that he was the ultimate authority in the drug cartel. The boss had the connections through the underworld and intelligence communities that he didn't understand. Someone had manipulated their scheme, removed millions from their control, and the organization behind Triangle Bank was in jeopardy. At least, the money in the other banks was safe; the bankers were in their back pocket and willing to be paid millions for their obedience.

He made a mental note to contact the foreign bankers in Australia, Japan, and America the next day to make sure that everything was moving according to plan. The Australian bankers were the main linkages to their future plans of manipulating the Asian financial centers for their benefit. The bankers were paid well, and they obeyed out of greed, as more money was pushed in their direction. If they didn't comply, their lives were worth little to their plans; they were only the bank vehicles for laundering millions of dirty money into clean safe havens for the cartel. Other bankers, dedicated to their cause, had been selected and were waiting on the sidelines until the right time to pick up the reigns of command.

Bernier rubbed his injured shoulder and backed away from the tirade of the American accent coming from the short Vietnamese looking up at him, his lips quivering in anger. The cell phone rang again, and his face went white; his jaw dropped when he heard the voice, a voice that he recognized from a meeting at the Central Bank in Saigon a few days ago.

Tan and Bernier were close enough to hear the brief exchange and they froze, shocked by the turn of events, feeling the control being ripped from under them. They were feeling like a trampled doormat created by an unseen force.

"*Tiep*, you know who this is. I'm coming after you, and if the girls are harmed, you're dead, and so are the faggots with you. I'll call you again in five minutes," he said as he disconnected.

Tiep shouted to empty air, "Where are you, and how did you get this number?"

The man named *Nguyen Thrang Tiep* spun around quickly, his lips quivering as he tried to regain control. The voice had shocked him. Where was he? And how did he have access to a confidential number that was known only by a few top party members?

He walked over to the window looking out to sea, the moon slowly finding its route through the clouds. Not even his most senior officers at the Central Bank in Hanoi had access to that number. It was used only for party business, and the party automatically recorded any conversation. It was the fear within the party that State secrets would be divulged that required every conversation of senior members to be censored and available to all other senior party members.

And the man from Saigon had his number. *Tiep* walked over to the desk in the corner and picked up another cell phone that he had placed with his papers. He punched a few numbers and spoke to his driver quickly, ordering him to be ready to leave soon and to let the southern policeman know of his plans, stepping back in astonishment and shouting in amazement in Vietnamese.

"What do you mean the policemen left? Contact them now, and order them back here immediately. I need their appearance of official protection. Get them back here now, or they'll go to the retention center for the next ten years like all ungrateful southerners who forget that the party rules the South," he screamed, disconnecting and throwing the cell phone on the desk, watching it roll, and bounce on the floor.

He quickly leaned over and picked it up, turned and looked at Tan and shouted, "You had better find Langston quickly, and after you've tortured him for all information about our organization, kill him. You're held responsible for this situation. Bernier," he shouted. "Get in contact with your entire group of bank idiots, and find out anything that you can about our money. Find out what happened to our cash, and I want an answer tomorrow," he commanded, turning quickly to glare at the women who were watching his tirade.

He raised his hand to continue, and his cell phone buried in his pocket, rang. He froze, threw the second phone on the desk again, and pulled the instrument from his pocket, saying, "Yes?"

"We're meeting tonight, *Tiep*. You'll not leave your hiding place at Bao Dai alive, if you harm the girls. You want information that I have, and you want some money. Right so far?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," he shouted into the phone, looking at the two men across the room.

"*Tiep*, you lost 500 million this afternoon, and I know how. I gave the orders. I want the girls, and you want information and cash. No girls--no information and no money. Talk to your real boss quickly, whoever he is, and get his ugly mug here to talk to me. I don't deal with underlings, and you're not smart enough to be the leader. You're a short idiot trying to be a big man running a drug cartel under the noses of leaders of the Communist Party," he said pausing to let the words sink into the mind of an astonished *Nguyen Thrang Tiep*. When the voice spoke again, *Tiep*'s expression turned from anger to fear that the conservation was being recorded, and he was dead.

"I'll ring you back in one hour. At that time, I expect to speak with your boss--not you."

Tiep started to say something in response, but instead stared at the dead phone. He wheeled around and glared at Tan, shouting and feeling the moisture oozing from his palms.

"Get your stupid guards prepared. He knows where we are, and he's coming after the women. We need to be prepared. Lock them up now," he commanded, turning to point a shaky finger in the direction of *Tuyet*.

The party chief stopped in amazement. The blue eyes were staring at him, and she was walking towards him smiling.

"You a poor example of a man," she said enjoying the moment.

Tiep quickly glanced to his left noticing the Vietnamese woman walking towards him. Tan and Bernier had walked close to the window looking out towards the ocean as the moon reached the sky, unaware of the girls moving catlike towards the party chief.

Tiep raised his hand to strike the smiling face with a dimple on her cheek. But his eyeballs followed the movements of the girl in front of him dressed in tight jeans. His eyes watched her in slow motion as she drove her right foot into his groin. He felt the pain cascading through his lower body; the image of crushing sounds echoing in his brain. He took a sharp intake of breath as he bent over, not realizing that her knee was crashing into the bridge of his nose. The force of the blow drove him backwards sending him crashing to the floor; the noise floating across the room forced the other two men to spin around.

Anh Phon raced towards the door like a cat, snatching a large brass candelabrum from the desk as she ran. She grabbed the door handle and jerked it open to find a surprised guard standing outside turning slowly to face the brass object crashing on his head. His knees buckled, as she stepped over him, and started down the hallway with *Tuyet* racing behind her.

At the door, *Tuyet* turned quickly feeling the presence of someone running behind her. She turned quickly grabbing the chair next to the door and shoved it in front of Bernier tripping him. He rolled on his injured shoulder screaming in pain as he hit the floor. The sudden movement caused Tan to stop, as the door slammed shut. He ripped it open to find another brass instrument slamming against his forehead. He screamed as he collapsed.

Tiep struggled to his feet and walked painfully to the desk looking at the two men spread on the floor. He grabbed his old cell phone, dialed the driver, and issued orders quickly.

"The women have escaped. Find them, and kill them immediately. Get the other guards prepared for an attack," he said twirling quickly to see Bernier and Tan struggling to their feet. He whirled on them furiously venting his rage at the two astonished men.

The feared cell phone rang from his pocket. He pulled it out, spoke slowly, and froze. He felt his world falling into an orbit as he collapsed to the floor, his eyes staring into space. He knew he was a dead man when he heard the voice of the Chairman of the Communist Party speaking to him from Hanoi. Had he overheard the phone con-

versation from Jonathan Langston, he wondered, as he spoke softly with the supreme leader of the country, trying desperately not to show any of the anxiety that twisted his guts.

TUYET AND ANH PHON RAN DOWN the stairs two at a time trying to reach the gardens before the guards had been summoned. They needed to reach the *Montagnards*, who would be well hidden, waiting for a signal to attack. They reached the huge front door, stopped and looked out carefully. They saw the limousine parked about twenty feet away, the interior lights shining, and the driver opening the door. Two Caucasian guards ran towards the car holding automatic weapons in their hands. They slithered out the door and ran into the shadows hoping to reach the far corner of the mansion before the men turned towards the door.

"How many guards are there?" *Anh Phon* gulped between breaths as she ran.

"I don't know, but we need to be prepared. See that path heading down the hill towards the beach. That's where we're heading," she gasped as they raced around the corner.

They dove into the darkness of the hill on the downward slope hearing the shouts and a slow burst of automatic fire. The bullets ricocheted off the branches over their heads as they ducked, ran, and stumbled on the unfamiliar ground. Memories of their escape from Saigon twenty years earlier entered their minds as they slid and ran. The scattered gunfire and shouts of men above spurred them on as they spotted the reflection of the moon on the crashing waves below.

Tuyet slipped and rolled over a border; *Anh Phon* tripped over her as they tried to regain their footing. They heard the shouts of the guards following them. The wolf pack barked as they picked up the trail of the prey. The girls quickly jumped to their feet and made that dash for freedom again in areas that were unknown to them, but knowing they had no choice, if they expected to live.

They turned the next bend, the branches scraping their faces. They tripped on the rocks on the steep decline. Halfway down, they heard

the men shouting as they picked up the trail to the beach below. They fled picking up more speed.

The two girls in their desperate flight failed to see four ethnics standing quietly in the shadows as they fled around another rocky bend. They smiled and turn their heads upwards and took positions silently. The older ethnic tossed a rope across the path, signaled and attached the end to a tree. He slid down with his companion and waited as the voices became louder.

The guards ran past the guerillas and rolled, as the rope caught them below the knees, causing them to tumble against each other and keep rolling until they slammed into a tree. Their guns had flown into the air when they hit the ropes and were now in the hands of the *Montagnards* who ran down the path.

The older of the ethnics reached the men first, and expertly wrapped ropes around their wrist and started dragging the men to their feet, as the other *Montagnards* started tying them spread eagle against the small trees along the path. They were prisoners of the *Montagnards*.

They tried to speak but their voices were silenced, as heavy tape was brutally strapped over their month and around their heads in quick movements. The guerillas stepped back quickly and looked at the captives strapped to four trees in a standing position straddling the path.

"We're ready," the older *Montagnard* said. "Go find the girls, and make sure they're safe. I'm going back to the house and set up the next phase. We still have four men up there on the other side. I'll contact the chief. Take the girls by the old road to the villa. If there are any changes, I'll contact you," he instructed as he spun around and disappeared up the hill.

One of the *Montagnards* swiftly reached into his backpack. With a few swift movements with nimble fingers, he taped a small block of C-4 to the calf of the larger guard.

He turned and smiled at the other guard saying softly, before disappearing down the path, "Anyone touching that thing will blow you to your heaven. Don't move, or try to get away. You're here for a long

time." The darkness closed behind the little man as he raced into the bush.

A night of terror began for the tough men working for the drug cartel as they stared at the cube strapped to the man's leg. They closed their eyes, sweat rolling from their faces and dove into their own private hell of terror. There was no escape for them.

THE MAN CALLED *TIEP* listened carefully as the chairman of the party spoke over the cell phone. The man's voice carried the ultimate authority, and everyone listened when he spoke. *Tiep* sat, feeling the gut-wrenching anxiety, as he heard the words. The chairman had summoned him back to Hanoi immediately. A military jet was on its way to pick him up at *Nha Trang*. A top-level meeting of the dedicated party members was to be held the following morning to discuss a crisis, which had been uncovered in Saigon by the dedicated men of the police force.

The trusted party men in the South had confiscated drugs, and other senior policemen from the North were involved. They were caught open-handed with about forty million dollars in raw drugs. Where they came from was still unclear, but the apprehension of top-level police officials would create an international scandal if the news leaked. And the chairman was determined to contain the crisis at all costs. The country could not afford a scandal of such magnitude, particularly when they were in deep negotiations with the World Bank and IMF for huge amounts of money to bring Vietnam out of a financial crisis. The country had to be seen as clean, and no scandals would be tolerated.

Only the most trusted party members were being summoned for the top-level meeting. The chairman left *Tiep* no choice. Attend or face suspicion for refusal.

He sat down in a chair by the desk looking at the two men slowly moving next to the door. He felt his rage surfacing again, but grabbed the older cell phone and dialed his driver. He spoke for a few minutes, disconnected, and walked over to the door painfully, rubbing his groin trying to relieve the shooting sharp agony of pain.

Bernier stood up slowly rubbing his wounded shoulder and reached over to help Tan who was struggling to his feet.

Tiep looked at them in disgust and said, "The women have escaped, and it's your fault, both of you. Two of the guards are chasing them to the beach, and they have orders to kill them. You're to follow, and make sure that they're dead," he commanded, turning to walk into the room. His cell phone rang again in his pocket. He froze, feeling the dreaded anxiety again as he connected, but hearing a different voice.

"*Tiep*, I'm coming after you now. Bernier and Tan will die. The girls are now safe with us. You have no way of getting out of your location, and you'll never make it to the airport if you're planning to leave. Your police friends have left, and two of your guards are isolated. The others will be isolated soon. Make a run, or wait, and we talk. You have nothing to bargain with now except your life. I want your boss. You're only his drug smuggler, and you're using your position in the Vietnamese government for the financial manipulation for the drug cartel. What's your answer?"

Tiep felt the sweat pour from his skin as he waited for another comment from Langston.

He spoke slowly hoping to disguise his words into a meaningless conversation if the recordings were listened to soon. He knew that his position within the government and within the party was cramped now. He needed to escape the country, but first, he needed time to speak with his father, who was the mastermind of the entire cartel behind the drugs and Triangle Bank laundering operations. He thought slowly, needing time to gather his thoughts. He looked at the two men at the door, a plan coming into focus as he spoke.

"Maybe what you say is true. Maybe you do have the lovely ladies which would benefit us, but I need information from you and soon. Let us meet, and I'll share some information with you that would truly be beneficial to everyone. I will contact someone who wants to see you, but it will take time, and that person is not in this country. By the way, I don't believe the ladies are with you. There are also two men here who want to meet you. You'll know them both, and one is from

Laos from the old days. You do remember the one that tried to rape your girlfriend. We'll be at the airport, west hanger in one hour. Be there," he finished abruptly, disconnecting to see the astonished look on Bernier's face.

"What are you doing, *Tiep*? I'm not going to be used as a setup for Langston. Use your own men."

Tiep cut him short as he reached into his pocket and pulled a small revolver.

"You'll come with me, and shut up, or you'll be eliminated now. You have no choice. *Tan*, you're coming as well. There's another plan being activated at this very moment, and if I'm right, Langston will be taken. His friend from the war days will face a surprise soon."

He walked out the door saying to the men behind him, "Follow me now."

JONATHAN LANGSTON SMILED, as he sat in the car beside *Quan* on the main road leading to the mansion. Two *Montagnards* were standing next to the car smiling, understanding that their real profession was ready to be tested. The cell phone rang, and Jonathan spoke quickly and precisely with Retired General Alexander Sloan outlining the position. Yes, the girls are safe, he said, and no we're not attacking the mansion.

"We're forcing *Tiep* to fall into his own trap. I've said enough on the number that *Tong* gave us to hang *Tiep* with his own government. We will not need to execute him. His own party will do that for us," Langston said disconnecting and smiling at his little protectors who followed the conversation.

Jonathan looked at them and asked, "How many bad guys are up there?"

The older leader of the *Montagnards* raised eight fingers and lowered two explaining what happened to them. *Quan* started laughing realizing the fear going through the tough boys' minds.

He said, "Leave them there, and let them sweat. They probably don't know that there are no detonators attached. Can we take out a few more to weaken *Tiep*'s resistance?"

"Yes, Elder Brother," the older man said flashing the open space in his mouth, his eyes sparkling. "How many do you want taken?"

Quan glanced at Jonathan who laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Anywhere between one and six will be okay. Maybe you can leave a bag next to the car with one of your playmates. If you can somehow get it past the driver, and somehow in the car, that would be even better," Jon said laughing at the two *Montagnards* who were rubbing their hands together. They swiftly turned and disappeared into the darkness.

Quan turned towards Jonathan and said quickly,

"Ring the scumbag again, and stall him for about ten minutes somehow to give the little guys a chance to do their tricks."

Before Jon could respond, his cell phone rang, and after a few moments he hung up and chuckled, "Forget it. The little characters have somehow flattened one of the tires. That gives them the time they need. Let's head for the airport now. The boys will come later."

TWO MONTAGNARDS CREPT UP TO THE EDGE OF THE garden; the limousine was about twenty feet from them. They split and went in opposite directions keeping the car in sight. The driver was visible, but unconcerned, about the world outside his domain. He spoke on his cell phone twice, which was the only time he turned the music down. After his call, the music would increase in volume, and his head would begin bobbing again with the beat of the rhythm.

One of the ethnics slowly raised his crossbow, fitted an arrow, and sighted. He glanced to the far right of the car noticing his friend concealed in the shadows holding a canvas bag. He gave the thumbs up sign and pulled the bowstring and fired.

The driver sat up quickly with the sharp explosive noise of the tire releasing air and the abrupt movement of the car as the front chassis hit the pavement of the circular drive in front of the mansion.

Oh crap, he thought, as he opened the door and walked to the front of the car to look around. He noticed a little shaft protruding from the tire and whirled around looking for intruders, but saw no one. He

leaned down wondering how had it gotten there, and said a few words under his breath, as the front door of the mansion opened.

The driver walked over quickly and spoke with *Tiep*, who walked out in front of the other two men. He listened, turned, and said something to the other two men and returned inside. Bernier and Tan walked down the side of the mansion disappearing down the path leading towards the ocean below.

The driver walked back to the car muttering under his breath and opened the trunk. He removed the spare tire quickly and walked to the front with the tools and started changing the tire. He was so occupied with his task that he didn't notice the interior light flash briefly and the door close silently moments later.

Ten minutes later, he closed the trunk, walked to the front and dialed *Tiep* who answered immediately. Within seconds after he disconnected, the door opened at the big house. *Tiep* walked out quickly and was halfway across the winding drive when he heard shouts coming from the path below. He whirled and looked in the direction as Bernier and Tan came charging out into the open, racing towards the car.

"Now, what is your problem?" shouted *Tiep*.

"Two of the guards are tied up down there with C-4 tied to their legs," Bernier answered, looking back down the path, feeling the fear race through his injured body.

Tiep whipped his head around shouting at the driver.

"Where are the other guards?"

"On the other side of the house in the lower part of the garden. They're doing a circular route covering the maximum area."

"Well, get them up here now. Have one man positioned on each corner of the house and two out here. We need to find out what happened to the two others. Send two men to get them now," he said turning to face Bernier who was heading for the car.

"Where are you going, Serge?"

"I'm getting myself out of here. If you want to come, jump in quickly, because I'm out," he said, stopping as he stared at the muzzle of the small revolver held in *Tiep*'s hand.

Bernier stepped back in resignation and walked over towards Tan and turned to face three guards who came running up the slope. *Tiep* issued instructions, and they disappeared in different directions. Three other men appeared and spoke with *Tiep*. One remained, and two others raced towards the path heading down the hill.

The driver turned and walked over to his car, wanting desperately to be on his way to take the northerner to the airport, and afterwards, to go home where there was safety. He was uncomfortable being with these people, but it was a cushy job as long as he followed orders and kept the man safe. He looked around slowly as *Tiep* walked towards the car. Bernier and Tan followed closely behind.

He opened the door and got in, turning the ignition key and revving the engine as the three men climbed inside. The driver failed to notice a canvas bag tucked neatly under the front seat, the top open. Serge Bernier climbed in slowly and cautiously looked at the man with the gun getting into the back seat. Bernier shifted his heavy body quickly to ease the pain in his wounded shoulder.

The driver drove slowly down the long circular drive, heading for the main road down the hill. He didn't notice the four little *Montagnards*, concealed and watching him, from behind the trees, smiling and waiting for the little surprise to surface. He didn't realize that three of the six guards died as the *Montagnards* crept up behind them, placing a blade in each one's throat and pulling backwards, then disappearing with their automatic weapons. He didn't know that the two guards trying to rescue their companions on the path leading to the beach were being tied up in the same grove of coconut trees, and C-4 planted on their bodies as a warning as well.

The car moved cautiously to the main road and turned slowly heading for the airport. The driver's head whipped around when Serge Bernier yelled in terror, opened the door, and jumped from the moving car, just as the hood below the emerald eyes reached its full height for the strike. The driver spun the car rapidly to the left, throwing the serpent against the door. His foot slammed the brakes, yelled at the occupants in the back, and followed Bernier out of the door as the car continued rolling down the road crashing into a tree and coming to a

Leaving It Behind

halt. Almost on impact, the back doors flung open. The taller man raced after *Tiep* down the street, dodging cars, moving up the hill fleeing from the danger in the crashed car.

Four *Montagnards* ran silently in the darkness watching the exit of the bad guys from the car. They stopped and started laughing as men chased each other, and the driver was nowhere in sight. The older *Montagnard* lifted his cell phone, dialed, and spoke.

"Six ugly guards are down. One pet with no fangs, and they don't know it, chased the people out of the car, and it's a mess. We're missing one cobra now, but that's life. Two more guards are tied up near the beach with their other two friends, and more C-4 has been planted. Three guards are down permanently. Our men are searching for the girls near the beach. And we're checking for more hostile people and will take them out," he said, pausing to look down the road as three men stood in the middle huddled together.

The short Vietnamese from the North was shouting with the revolver raised in the air, shouting orders to go back to the car and to the airport. But the driver was nowhere to be seen. The little *Montagnards* laughed at the comical side, turned, and headed up the road to their car.

The older ethnic leader said giggling into the cell phone, "They have lost a driver. We'll see who drives now and play a game with them on the way. We'll follow them to the airport."

THIRTEEN

TUYET AND ANH PHON RACED down the hill, turning every bend, without realizing that branches were taking big swipes at their faces. They didn't care, and they didn't feel the scratches and cuts. Freedom was ahead and not behind. They slipped and stumbled over the hidden objects on the path. In the distance, a large sea going luxury boat floated sedately with the movement of the waves, but it was too far for them to cry out for assistance. They failed to notice the small dinghy landing on the sandy beach fifty meters ahead and continued running down the hill towards the rocky outcrops on the beach line.

Tuyet stopped abruptly as they reached the beach, *Anh Phon* slammed into her back. *Tuyet* pointed ahead at the skiff, and they dove into the scrub at the edge of the path. They sucked in, deeply feeling the fresh air reviving their depleted lungs, feeling the relief from the terror of the narrow escape. *Tuyet* looked at her friend, and then looked up as the moon moved slowly behind the clouds giving the area a ghostly appearance.

She said softly, "There's a small boat ahead, and it looks empty. We need to be cautious, as there may be other men down here. Oh God, where are *Jon* and *Quan* when we need them?" she pleaded, feeling the tears flowing down her cheeks.

She needed her man, but she knew that she had to remain calm. Vivid memories of the Saigon escape years ago popped into her mind.

What other dangers are ahead, she wondered, feeling the tug on her arm and hearing a soft voice.

"There's movement in the rocks ahead. It looks like men are sitting close in the shadows, but I can't tell how many there are," she said moving back into the shadows, and shifting into a position for a clearer view of the shoreline.

Anh Phon turned suddenly pointing at two men who were walking toward the small boat. One man had something against his face.

"They're speaking to someone, and those guys are not Vietnamese. We need to go back up the hill and find another path to cross over above them. We're about five kilometers from *Nha Trang*," she indicated, pointing at the city lights in the distance.

"We need to find our way there and somehow contact *Quan* or *Jon*," the little Vietnamese said, feeling the confidence flowing back into her mind. They were racing back into the darkness of the jungle from years ago, but the enemy was far more dangerous this time.

They stood slowly and started walking up the path slowly. They heard a shout from the beach, spun around, and ran further into the bush, retracing their steps up the hill. The voices became clearer as they ran. Men were running in their direction shouting at each other, and then silence.

Tuyet turned quickly to the right taking another smaller path that they had almost missed that appeared to lead over the slope in the direction around the compound above. They stumbled and ran, losing track of time as they wove through the undergrowth.

Tuyet stopped suddenly and dove into the scrub, *Anh Phon* following her. They slid into the darkened recesses of the rocks jutting out from the hill and flattened themselves as close to the ground as possible.

The ragged noise of breathing came from around the bend ahead as two men climbed the last uphill segment from the beach. They stopped, and one man spoke on a cell phone; then they continued following the path. The other man followed slowly, breathing deeply from the weariness of the climb.

The moon broke from the clouds, casting its rays clearly on the two men as they walked on the cliff's edge. The girls slid deeper into their recess as the men stopped and looked around. One man's eyes wandered over the path and into the rocky incline.

Tuyet could see his bushy eyebrows sitting over the jet black eyes as he searched the undergrowth. His eyes focused on the path, searching for signs. He turned towards his companion and motioned him up the hill, reaching under his shirt removing an ugly automatic. *Tuyet* felt the scream coming from her throat and bit her lip to silence the noise before it escaped from her mouth.

The man searched the area as the women hugged the ground deeper. He turned and looked out towards the yacht anchored in the waters off the coast. There was a flash of light from the boat and signals were being shot ashore in rapid succession. They were being summoned. He turned abruptly as his companion came charging down the path, fear written over his face as he shouted.

"They want us back on the boat now. There are four of our men tied up in the grove and there's no way I'm getting near them."

"What are you talking about?" shouted the taller man as he slid the automatic back in his belt, turning to follow his companion down the slope.

"They have explosives tied to their bodies. And the big boys are running to the airport now. Something happened up there, and we've been told to get back to the boat now. The others are waiting on us, so let's move," he yelled as he ran down the path.

The taller man turned his head quickly and looked for the last time into the darkened recesses of the rocky overhang. He reached under his shirt again but was too slow. Two dark figures ran out from the rocky ledges, forcing the man to step back quickly. With the surprise at seeing two armed men racing at him, he stepped into the void and flipped over the cliff to his death below.

The shorter man stopped momentarily, yelling at the other man to follow, when he heard the scream as his companion hit the rocks below. He turned, and ran without looking back, stumbling over the

rocks as he dashed down the trail, his cell phone to his mouth as he fled.

Minutes later, he dashed across the sand to reach the smaller craft preparing to leave over the bouncing waves. He stumbled, trying to pull the wooden shaft from the center of his back as his face buried itself in the sand. The two men in the small boat reacted quickly by turning the Zodiac around and preparing to leave without the two men from shore. They stopped quickly and drew their guns, but not fast enough before two arrows found the mark in their upper torsos. The Zodiac deflated quickly as another arrow found its mark.

One of the men struggled to get to his feet and pulled his gun as the razor sharp knife fled over the surface of his throat. The second man turned his gun to his head and fired.

On the hill fifty meters up from the death below, two *Montagnards* walked to the rocky incline and spoke for the first time.

"*Tuyet* and *Anh Phon*, you should stop hiding from us young ladies. We have been watching you for sometime, and you did well by hiding there. You're safe with us now. Let's go find the chief, or he'll kick us to death for failing to protect you."

As the two women crawled slowly from under the rocks, looking around cautiously, the older ethnic spoke on his cell phone to someone in the distance. He laughed and turned as two *Montagnards* ran up the hill, carrying confiscated weapons. They smiled at *Tuyet* and *Anh Phon* and took them by their arms and started the long climb up the opposite side of the hill, following some unseen path known only by the little guerillas of the mountains.

JONATHAN LANGSTON STOOD WITH QUAN as the chief spoke to his men on the main road near the airport hanger. The chief turned quickly to face the two friends when he finished talking, concern written on his face.

"Jonathan, we have *Tuyet* and *Anh Phon*, but there's big trouble. Our men took out the bad guys on the shore, but there's a luxury yacht sitting off the coast signaling and waiting for someone. It's connected

to the big man who's trying to drive the car to the airport," he reported, smiling as he pointed to the sky.

"The mystery is up to him now. We should find out from the general if the CIA guys have been taken in Washington," the chief said stopping when Jonathan's cell phone rang.

He stood listening, and his concerns rose as he heard the younger man's words and anxiety as he spoke. The plot was thickening, and they needed a break, the chief decided. He needed to pause for awhile, feeling the weariness flow through his slim body. How many hours had past since they last slept? He wondered.

Jonathan clinched his fist as he listened, feeling the anxiety flow through his body. He stared at the airport hanger in front of him and looked around at the men sitting under guard of the *Montagnards*. He slowly turned to face *Quan*.

Jon said slowly, "The girls are safe, but the general's not," he said walking over towards the Mafia prisoners as he pulled his knife. *Quan* and the chief followed wondering what was on the young man's mind.

The three men slithered against the wall when they saw the hatred in the man's eyes and the sharp knife being rotated in his hand as he walked towards them. The older man wearing the suit tried to say something, but the words were struck in his throat. The heat in the hanger was overbearing, but nothing compared with the torridity coming at them.

Jonathan stopped and rotated the handle shouting, "Who owns that yacht anchored off the coast?"

The man in the suit tried to speak again, but the words were blocked. The shorter man, who had injected Langston's brother years ago, had a little more courage, and he saw this as his only way to remain alive.

"The yacht belongs to the head operators who work this region. They use it to transport supplies between countries, and they stay in protected areas within this country."

"Who are the head operators that you're talking about?" shouted the man wielding the knife as he knelt in front of the prisoner.

The man looked around, and his eyes settled on the leader in the suit who slid down in resignation. Everything was lost, and they would not live if they lied now. He spoke cautiously realizing that they had no option.

"We use the boat most of the time, but it's owned by the cartel. The masterminds are on that plane heading for the States, if it hasn't already arrived there. They're the men who head the operations, and they stay well concealed. As I've said before, I have no idea who else is involved above them, but I'm certain that someone else is pulling the strings."

"Why do you say that?" Langston asked turning to face the chief and *Quan*, who had a frown appearing on his forehead.

The chief turned abruptly and walked to the other side of the small hanger, taking a cell phone from one of his men. The air was stale, and the heat unbearable in the confined space as the men watched each other, feeling the tension floating in the atmosphere. Langston turned his attention back to the gangster who was speaking softly.

"When we need to make a quick decision on the movement of drugs, or when government officials were interfering with us, they always delay a decision as if they're seeking advice or clearance from someone else. I've tried to ask or push for quick decisions when these cases arose, but I have always been told to wait. No explanation and no reason were given. Eventually, one of them would come back to us, and often the position would be the reverse of what we expected. And it always had a government implication. Again, we had no choice but to follow the decision without question. I refused once, and that was the last time. That was clear, and I'm worried about the position that I'm in now."

"Why do you say that, and why did you oppose them?" *Quan* asked as he moved closer to the conversation.

"I thought it was too dangerous to be too close to a government involvement. But they were not concerned, saying that the governments were not a problem, but refusing to give an explanation. Once, I refused to follow their orders, and they told me, by an intermediary, that I was to follow their decision or die. I followed and regretted that

decision because it set us up to take a fall if something went wrong—like now. That's all that I can say."

"Have you met the heads of the whole operation or CIA boys involved?" asked Jon.

"No, and I've said it before. They operate from a distance, and we receive orders from other people, but we don't meet the big guys. We're paid well, but we're also expendable. And we can't get out. We locked into this operation until we're dead or until we find a way to disappear permanently. There's something sinister about the operation. The trafficking of drugs in this region will never be eradicated. The powerbrokers in the governments, and the banks will not allow it. There's too much money involved, and the demand for the drugs is too much around the world, and they want to keep that demand growing," he stopped, pausing to rub the sweat from his face.

He looked at Langston and *Quan*, sadness showing on his face; fear was in his voice as he spoke.

"This operation started during the war. And it will become a war if you or any government try to stop it," he warned, pausing to stare into space. "I've said too much, and I will die by talking. It has all been for nothing. Misguided people during the war hoping to make a quick buck, until we were sucked in so deep that we couldn't get out," he said angrily.

"And where are they now?" asked *Quan* as he turned to look at the chief walking up to them quickly holding his cell phone to his lips, shouting in his dialect.

"The only thing we know was they were leaving on that C-17 with the bodies this afternoon. If they're not on it, I have no idea," Jon said, pausing as the chief started talking to Jon and *Quan* rapidly.

The old man was agitated and spoke angrily. He held the small black box to his lips and tried to converse in two languages. In desperation, he put the instrument at his side and stared at the younger men. He needed advice as something had happened, and for once, they saw him losing confidence.

"Slow down, Chief. What's the problem?" Jonathan asked recognizing the older man's dilemma.

"My men are supposed to be protecting the general."

"Yes, so what's the problem?"

"Sloan has ordered them away from the villa. He told them they were no longer needed."

Jonathan stared at the old warrior in disbelief, asking gently trying to calm his nerves. "Why did he do that, and when did this happen?"

"I don't know. About thirty minutes ago, and my men are not happy about it," he said exasperated, pausing to look around the hanger.

"What happened?" Langston pushed for an answer.

"Three cars pulled in, and some men in military type uniforms unloaded, and the general met one of the men on the terrace. They knew each other. The military men took positions around the villa. The general spoke to the main man for awhile inside and came out and summoned *Thrang* and told him to leave with my men. No explanations were given. *Thrang* was upset and argued with him. One of the military men came over and shoved a rifle into his gut and pulled the trigger. The General tried to stop him but was forced by two men to go back into the villa. Two of my men picked up *Thrang*, and he's at the hospital. He may not make it; we don't know. My men are now out of sight but close by waiting until we tell them what to do. They are ready to storm the place, but they're concerned about Alexander. What do we do now?" the chief asked as he turned putting the cell phone to his lips and speaking rapidly.

When he spoke again, Jonathan's world twisted, and his anger soared.

"Our men arrived a few minutes ago with *Tuyet* and *Anh Phon*, and ... they've being taken inside. My men are tied up outside on the veranda. What is going on, Jon?"

"I don't know. What did the leader of this military group look like?"

They didn't see him well, except he was a tall slim man dressed in a suit. He's a foreigner, and the general knew him. They knew each other well, and that's what frightens me."

Langston looked around, trying to think; his mind projecting the worst; his fears for the safety of *Tuyet* and the others escalated. He grabbed his cell phone and punched a few numbers. A voice on the other end answered, and Jonathan knew they had lost the first round in the campaign. *Quan* was next to Jonathan and heard the words coming from a tired old voice before he disconnected.

"Jon, you must come in as we've lost the game. I've made a choice years ago, and you must now choose. Goodbye, my son."

THREE MEN SPED DOWN THE MAIN ROAD outside *Nha Trang*. They were in a hurry, and the driver lost no time in breaking all the traffic rules, if there were any regulations to be obeyed in Vietnam. He was a man not used to driving, and he was angry at being forced to do such a menial task, but he had no choice. Anyway, they had been ordered to appear by his father, and his father always expected to be obeyed. He was left with no alternative. The location of the meeting was described, and he pushed the pedal to the floor with his right foot, clinching his jaws in anger.

Bernier sat silently in the backseat, terrified as he watched the road bounce in front of the lights; people ran from the sides of the road when the car bounced over the potholes with the driver's hand solidly on the horn. The lights of the airport zoomed by with the madman behind the wheel.

The Frenchman bolted upright and looked back as the lights faded in the distance and shouted at the driver weaving on the road, narrowly missing motorcycles.

"Aren't we going to the airport to meet those characters?"

"No," came the sharp response.

"We're going to meet some other people and complete something that you failed to do. That's all you need to know at this point," he quipped as he sped across the narrow bridge in the center of *Nha Trang*.

"Forget it, *Tiep*. I failed nothing. You're the idiot that sat in that meeting at the Central Bank in Saigon with Langston and said something that led him to our money."

Bernier's face slammed brutally against the back of the seat as *Tiep* hit the brakes with such force that the car spun and skidded into a pole on the side of the road. The man turned rapidly as Bernier straightened himself in the back and saw the rage in the man's eyes. Bernier saw the small hole appear over the seat and ducked as *Tiep* squeezed the trigger. The explosion inside the car pounded the ear-drums of the men.

Tiep screamed his rage and struggled with Frank Tan who had quickly grabbed the man's wrist and was trying to take the gun. Tan jerked the wrist in a quick backward motion, and *Tiep* screamed when the pain shot through his forearm, releasing the gun as it slid to the floor.

Tan shouted, "You drive this stupid car, and none of your theatrics! You're an idiot, *Tiep*, and a danger to the entire operation. We need to see the old man now, and you had better get your stupid butt moving. We don't trust you, and if things went off the rails, it's because of your arrogant stupidity. You're in this thing for one reason and one reason only. You're highly placed in the government because of your old man. But if you step out of line again, you're dead. Your old man will pull the trigger, if I don't before him," he said shifting his position to look at Bernier.

"And that goes for you, also. Step out of line again, and regret it. We have things to do, and the old man is waiting for us. He's controlling Langston's backer and his girlfriend now. We're going to salvage the position, and people will die if we don't get our money back. They'll die anyway, and so will you, if you make one more mistake."

Serge Bernier slouched in the backseat nodding his head, wishing there was some way for him to be out of this mess. But he knew there was no escape. His life was over, but before he died, he wanted to pull the trigger on the man he missed twenty years ago. He wanted to have the satisfaction of watching the life drain out of the man. And he wanted to taste his girlfriend before he killed her. Bernier sat up hearing Tan's words.

"Our people have General Alexander Sloan under our control now. The girls also. Langston has spoken to Sloan. Langston will

make the next move, and we're using the general as our bargaining pawn, Bernier. And you're to do nothing without me. If you go near the girls, I'll pull the trigger myself. We need them to get Langston," he commanded, turning to face the angry senior banker in the Vietnamese government and the elite Communist Party man.

The man who dreamed of being at the top of the party listened intently. His plans were slipping out of his grip. Tan's voice drilled into his ears as he turned to face the man.

"Now drive, *Tiep*, before you piss me off again. Call your police friends, and tell them that you're leaving *Nha Trang*. You're to instruct the pilots to takeoff with someone who's at the airport. He looks like you, and he's taking your place on this flight. But that jet will never arrive in Hanoi. And you will be a hero in the eyes of your government and your stupid party. Your mother will mourn your death, but she will have the comfort in the knowledge that your twin brother will take your place in our organization. He's the man who has the vision and strength to run a complex cartel that was set up by your parents. Now, get out of here, and drive slowly."

The little man behind the wheel maneuvered the car away from the pole and pulled out slowly, thinking about what Tan had just said. He knew that he needed to contact the airport, but he was unaware of the other person taking his place. How had these people managed to outmaneuver him? he wondered, as he drove slowly down the street.

And the revelation that his long forgotten brother was trained to take his place in the cartel disturbed him deeply. He had never suspected the treachery. And he hated his brother, had always rejected the man as an idiot, and now he found himself in the reverse situation. The favorite son betrayed by his parents for some reason. Why had they betrayed him, or was this a ploy created by Tan? He wondered, watching the traffic ahead.

Nguyen Thrang Tiep hadn't seen his twin brother in years but had always suspected that his parents had him safely tucked away in the organization for the right moment. His parents never spoke to him about his brother, and he never asked questions about him—he didn't exist in his life.

He knew that his brother had also been sent to the best schools in Europe, and they hadn't spoken to each other in years. Their destiny in life was so different. He was a political leader and that was the path in life that had been chosen for him. His brother was only concerned about corporate games, and he played the game well with money generously created by his parents. It was years after he finished his education before he was told where the money was contrived. And his path in the organization was defined, which he accepted without any questions.

Tiep's concern was all about political power and manipulation. Why are they doing this to me? he wondered. He had always been loyal to them, but the realization that he was not the favorite son depressed him. Now is the time to prepare, he decided, as he drove thinking about the man next to him with the gun.

He reached for his cell phone and punched a set of numbers. The phone on the other end rang once, and he spoke with airport control. He spoke in Vietnamese stating that he would be there shortly, and the military jet from Hanoi was to be prepared for immediate takeoff.

Tiep drove in silence remembering the years in America, living the good life at Harvard University; the top of his class, and never a worry about money. His bank account was always loaded, and if he needed more, he would send a secret message to his mother in Hanoi, and it was fixed. He saw his father a few times each year, and he knew that his mother's position in the Vietnamese government prohibited long visits with his father. His father was a foreigner and would never be accepted by the cadre in the Communist Party. And, if the knowledge ever leaked about the association, his mother's position in the government would become untenable.

He remembered that his father never spoke about his mother or his twin brother. It was as if they didn't exist. But he always suspected that his father knew more than he would say. *Tiep* realized, as a young man, that he was being programmed for a top position in his country's government and in the Communist Party. His parents wanted him to succeed, and he had worked hard to be where he was today. And the rug had just been pulled from under his feet. And to-

night, he would be meeting his father after many years, and he wanted answers. He would demand answers from both parents, or he would expose the deception using his country.

Tiep slowed down as he turned into the dirt road leading into the valley heading towards the villa of General Alexander Sloan and his enemy Jonathan Langston. He had always known that they owned the property through a company based in Singapore. But party officials were paid well each year for them to live there. Now, it was time for him to take over the estate as his personal home. Sloan is a foreigner, and he was a senior cadre of the party, a man who was respected by his peers. The chairman was making noise of his succession, and he was in a prime position.

As the car bounced over the dirt road leading to the estate through the valley and hills before descending again to the coastline, *Tiep* smiled and felt the pleasure flowing through his body. Tonight he would see his beloved father again after many years, and he would demand answers. And when he had the answers, he would find his brother and kill him.

His twin brother was an obstacle to his future plans, and he couldn't afford being disgraced if it became known that the man existed. As he drove, he made plans about his brother's death. He knew where he lived in Australia, and it was only a matter of time before he was eliminated. The party had people roaming the world eliminating politically dangerous people that were a threat to the party. Yes, he decided. My dear brother will no longer be an obstacle to my plans, and his death will not be missed by anyone.

Nguyen Thrang Tiep smiled and felt the relief of his decisions, as he drove the car into the last long coconut grove leading to the villa of his enemies. As the lights bounced off the coconut palms, he failed to notice the eyes that followed their entry into the property. He didn't realize that one of the *Montagnards* was speaking to the chief on a cell phone, making plans about rescuing the occupants of the villa.

Tonight was going to go mad for *Nguyen Thrang Tiep*, and all he could feel was the pleasure of seeing his father again and going home the next day. He had instructed the airport control to arrest his look-

alike and confiscate the government jet until further notice. And it's too bad that Tan and Bernier didn't speak his language, he thought. As he rounded the last bend on the dirt track, he was unconcerned about passing the Range Rover stacked against a coconut tree.

A SMALL MILITARY AIRCRAFT of the Vietnamese Air Force landed in the distance and started its turnaround to the apron next to their hanger. Jonathan and *Quan* watched the aircraft with curiosity wondering why it was heading in their direction. This hanger was supposed to be secure, and no other aircraft allowed near it. Jonathan turned to say something to the pilot when his cell phone rang.

He smiled for the first time that evening when he heard a familiar voice through the Dalat exchange. He listened and said thanks as he disconnected. He turned and pointed towards the car headlights that were following the small aircraft. The car passed the small jet and stopped in front of the hanger, and two blue uniformed policemen got out and walked over to the small group as the jet shut down its engines. They spoke and Jonathan turned to the pilots.

"Call your people in Washington, and put that yacht going down the coast under surveillance by the satellites. It has some rogue CIA guys aboard, and it's probably loaded with drugs. When it hits international waters, we want it confiscated, and the people arrested and detained for questioning by the drug enforcement people who are on their way here. There are two U. S. Naval ships sitting out there, and they're to board that boat. And if anyone resists, use force. Find out if that C-17 has landed in Dallas Airport. And interrogate everyone on that plane including any military personnel. The plane is to be searched," he said, pausing to look at *Quan* who was talking with the friendly blues.

He turned and said, "Have this baby ready to leave at a moment's notice. We'll decide the flight plan after we takeoff. We have work to do now. We're going on a rescue mission, and the police will stay here for your protection. That military jet has been grounded, and they have arrested a few people. We'll not be sleeping tonight, and I would suggest that you place this plane on the apron, so we can leave

quickly, if we have to," he finished, turning to walk over to the group of men under the military jet, answering his cell phone, and speaking to Dalat.

The evening breeze flowed through the hanger coming in from the coastal waters. It helped to relieve the tension. Plans needed to be made, and everyone prepared. The chief walked up to Jonathan smiling; his confidence returned.

"Are you ready, my son?" he asked.

"Yes. Your men need to act with precision, and timing will be crucial, if we're to come out alive with everyone. *Tiep* is not the problem. It's the mystery man who knows Alexander who's the challenge. Who is the scumbag? He's the man that's the main leader, and we need to take him alive if we can. Now, here's what we need to do."

Quan joined them as they sat in the breeze. They spoke and refined their strategy to get into the villa. *Quan* was to be the backup. Jonathan would go in alone. The chief's men were to stay invisible taking out the military-styled protectors of the men holding Sloan, *Tuyet* and *Anh Phon*. The guerilla warriors from the Central Highlands were to do what they did best. Create chaos around the villa, silently. Surprise was paramount to success.

The pilot came and sat next to the men, saying quickly, "They have the yacht under surveillance now. The ships are out about ten miles, and they will board it as soon as it crosses the ten-mile limit. If there is any resistance, they've been ordered to shoot it out of the water," he said turning to look at the smiling *Montagnard* who was rubbing his hands.

"Chief, I'm proud to have worked with you. You are a true warrior, and I would like tell my grandchildren all about my trip with you and your people. Thanks for letting me work with you," he said standing to walk back.

He heard the chief's words. "It's been a pleasure for us, too. Any-one who can take that metal tube off the ground is a genius. Thanks to you also young man for putting it safely back on the ground."

Jonathan watched the small group around him and realized that they would not fail. He knew that they would come out alive, and this

was his home and with these people. He was out of this game after tonight, and he and *Tuyet* were staying in this country and letting someone else chase the drug cartels. He made a commitment to the general years ago, and that commitment would be finished tonight. He was tired of the constant chase, the never-ending dangers. Let the governments do the search and destroy missions on the drugs. They had the people who were dedicated to follow through with what he and Alexander started.

Tuyet was the only person who mattered to him and these people from the hills. *Quan* and *Anh Phon* mattered. The old woman's prophecy of years ago mattered, and it was time to move. He looked at his two friends and smiled as he reached for his cell phone and dialed the number at the villa. *Quan* watched him, understanding that Jonathan was more committed now than he was when they made their escape from Saigon in 1975, with the Vietcong breathing down their backs each step of the way.

The phone rang once some miles away and a tired old voice spoke one word.

"Yes."

"Alexander. Put this call on the speaker so the idiots holding you can hear me."

"Okay," he responded, as Jon heard the click and sounds coming from the large room on the coast.

"Al, I am speaking with you, and I want them to hear everything."

"Understood."

"Are you safe for the moment?"

"For the moment."

"And *Tuyet* and *Anh Phon*?"

"Yes. They're tied up across the room looking at me. There are two guards in the room," he offered, stopping abruptly as Jon heard flesh against flesh cascade across the airwaves.

"Alexander, don't say anything that is going to put you in jeopardy. The idiot that just hit you will be a dead man before the night is over. Where's Cairns?"

"In the study with a guard. I don't think he'll make it. The man said that he's no use to them and should have been eliminated years ago..." his voice drifted off as the sound of flesh pounded the air-waves, and an American voice came across the mobile sharply. Jonathan and *Quan* stared at each other as they heard *Nguyen Thrang Tiep* speak with an arrogant mockery in his voice.

"You will come here alone, Langston, or these people will die tonight. I'm tired of your games, and I want the answers to our missing money. Their lives for our money, and it will be finished tonight!" he shouted.

"Not so fast, little man. Your look-alike has been arrested at the airport. Hanoi has been told that your jet has been confiscated, and that you're involved—you're a leader in an international drug cartel operating under the nose of the party. You can make all the threats..."

"You can't say thing like that. You're a dead man, Langston. Now, come in now. You know where we are and bring information!" he shouted.

"I'll be there when I'm ready. I'll call back in five minutes, and I want to speak with your boss."

"I'm the boss!" he yelled, but he was shouting into a dead speaker, staring at his father who stood silently rubbing his moustache in deep thought and looking out the window to the gardens beyond. The older man turned to face the window in the far corner of the huge room as another man walked out from the shadows and spoke.

"You're the boss of nothing, my idiot brother. We have plans for you, and those plans no longer include Hanoi," he threatened walking over to stand next to his identical twin brother. They were dressed exactly the same, and *Nguyen Thrang Tiep*, the party official's, life turned upside down as his brother smiled at him and spoke to the older man rubbing his moustache.

"Are we ready, Father?"

"Yes, dispose of the ASIO character. He is of no further use to us," the tall man dressed in a loose fitting suit said, turning towards one of the guards, and nodding his head to execute his order.

The guard turned and disappeared down the hallway without saying a word. The man turned and faced the younger man and spoke leaving no room for an argument.

"Alert the guards, and have them roam the grounds. Shoot anything that moves, except Langston. I want him alive for the moment. And keep Bernier out of my sight, before I shoot him myself," he said with a pronounced English accent which he had acquired at birth.

"Okay, and do you want to speak to Langston when, and if, he calls back?"

"Not necessary. You take the call and stall him. Get as much information as you can. Our boat is coming around to pick us up soon, but we need time to organize a few things, before we vanish," he said, looking over at Serge Bernier pacing the room relentlessly.

Frank Tan sat in an oversized chair near the window, secure in the knowledge that he was safe from any repercussions of Mr. N, for the moment. The man was insane and had an obsession with power and secrecy. The old man has trained him well, he thought.

Tan watched Bernier closely, thankful that he had avoided any direct working relationship with the man in Sydney. Bernier had been the organizer for the money to speed silently through the banking system, and he had done it well, until lately when he had lost control of the money flow. What really happened, he thought, looking at the man. He had been the link between the organizations within the cartel that needed a safe haven to clean the dirty money earned from drug supplies. Bernier had always been expendable as soon as the entire network was running smoothly.

And it was running nicely until Langston stepped into the picture in Sydney and cornered the two Australian bankers at the stock exchange. It didn't matter now. They have been replaced, and their execution had been ordered by the man rubbing his moustache, and who was letting his son called Mr. N, take control.

The Sydney bankers would be executed in about six hours when they left their homes to go to work, Tan thought, looking at his watch. They would die in the same manner as the traitor, David Neetham, who had become too nervous about Mr. N and was voicing his con-

cerns openly to the wrong people. The old man had created a brilliant long-term scheme, and it had worked beautifully, until Langston and Sloan put their noses into the picture and started meddling. Now, it was time to eliminate them, and take control over the cartel's money through the banking system, and slowly tie up the banks, which would allow the cartel absolute control over the supply and distribution. The next step for the cartel was to dictate through the power of financial control over the destiny of the countries where the drugs originated. Nothing could stop them, and then they would control governments.

The cartel was the link between the drug supplies to the finance control and laundering of massive funds through the banking systems. And they now had indirect control over every major crime organization in the world at the distribution end of the cycle because they controlled the banks.

Their laundering operations were in the billions now and growing quickly. The last hindrance was the general and Langston and whoever was backing them. It was all a big mystery but the old man would learn the secret tonight, or they would take it to their graves. The general and his friends were in the way, and they would be eliminated with or without the information, and the cartel would launch the next phase. And Asia would end up with a financial crisis never seen before.

There was one man operating from Australia who had the ability and the connection within the governments to force the control back covertly. And now, he had finally met that man, and he had witnessed the cruelty of the man if anyone crossed him, including his son. And he was petrified to step out of line. They still need me, he thought. Or do they? Tan wondered, as he turned to face the father talking with his sons, when the phone rang again.

The twin brother grabbed the phone and spoke.

"When are you coming to the villa, Langston?"

There was a pause before the voice came across the speaker. When it spoke, the brothers stared at each other in disbelief. They had

not expected to hear her voice, as she was always silent in their business.

"Put your father on the line, and stop wasting time."

The man turned, punched a button, took the phone to the other side of the large room, sat down, and spoke. He stared at the twins across the room and listened to their mother. He twisted his weight slightly in his chair and looked at the general whose head was slumped on his chest, his hands tied behind his back, an old warrior who had lost the campaign, and he was resigned to his fate. The general's bald head was shining with the lights bouncing off his dome.

He glanced at the two women tied to their chairs. They spoke quietly to each other watching the guards, as they stood at the doors, occasionally speaking on the cell phones to other men outside the house.

Tuyet was showing signs of tiredness, but as she watched the man with the moustache speaking on the phone, she saw hope. Something had gone wrong, and he was a worried man. His eyes darted around the room, moisture was showing on his forehead, and his hands twitched with agitation. He glanced at the twins, and when he spoke, they turned quickly to face him. His words to their mother shocked them.

"One of your sons will live; one must die. He's no longer needed. You must leave the country now. You know where to meet me. It's time to move now. I'll finish up here, and burn the place to the ground."

The man stood and walked over towards his twin sons and smiled. Alexander Sloan lifted his head and stared at the man he had known for years in the clandestine operations of governments, disgusted with the man, and feeling the power of betrayal. He wanted revenge now, and he had to keep his wits. He had to hold on, to stay alive until Jonathan made his move. Enough signals had been given. Will he guess that the leader is the man standing in front of the twins talking now, he wondered. A man they had confided with in Sydney and told him everything. He stared at the man he hated now, and who he had trusted only days ago.

The general had lost track of which boy was whom. He glanced over at the women thinking. You will be saved, and *Tuyet*, you will have your life with my son. I promise you that.

WHY DID THE GENERAL USE THE WORD THEM? Who are they? The questions kept going through his mind as he stood with the small group of men. *Quan* stood with Jonathan and let him float in his lone world. Jonathan needed time, *Quan* realized.

Jonathan turned quickly and faced his friend, a man who he trusted without any questions, and they had lived a lifetime together. He said, looking around at the chief, who was speaking to his men, but glancing at the younger men often.

"Why did Al stress the word them when he mentioned Cairns?"

"Maybe Cairns was part of their operations under deep cover"

I don't believe that for a minute. He was more concerned about the drug operations than any man that I've known. But he knew or suspected something that he couldn't tell us. He made a few allusions to things when I was in Saigon, and I didn't listen carefully enough. No, Cairns knew something, or he had stumbled onto something, and he was too close to them," Jonathan said watching *Quan* closely.

"Close to them, but not part of them," *Quan* stated. "And who did he work for, and who mysteriously disappeared over the past few days when a man in his position should be on deck and available for decisions? And..."

"And how would that boss fit into the picture with a man like *Tiep*, who is the decision maker, or is he?" Jonathan said, shoving his hands into his pockets in frustration, then turning to face the chief. "Get your men ready to move. We're going after our friends."

"Good," said the chief smiling, rubbing his hands together, and running off shouting at his people, telling them it was time for them to stop being lazy and get back to their real job.

Quan and Jonathan laughed at the comical movement of the experts, who defied danger, and were driven by the excitement of it coming their way.

The pilot ran over to Jonathan and said excitedly, "The old man in Washington has jumped into your game and has ordered two Black-hawk helicopters here loaded with marines from the ships. They'll arrive in a few minutes. What do you what us to do?"

"Keep the damn marines here to protect you and the jet. They're deckhand marines and useless for what we going to do. Besides they're no match for the *Montagnards*, and they would only slow us down and get in the way. The helicopters can take us into two drop off points," he confirmed looking at *Quan*.

"What do you think, my friend?" he asked smiling and feeling the relief.

"I'll go in with the chief, but you need to give us thirty minutes to get into position, and no marines. They lost the war once, and we don't need them now."

The pilot stood and listened to the two friends, and the chief walked over and joined the conversation. He watched the excitement grow as the little man spoke. They discussed the tactics at the villa. The chief had no problems until Jonathan told him about the helicopters. He stammered when he spoke and eyes flew open in disbelief and horror.

"You are crazy if you think I'm going on one of those machines," he said frightened, and they argued until they heard the rotor blades pounding the air in the distance. The little *Montagnards* stared in the darkness as the giant bugs nestled themselves to earth, the doors slid open, and twelve marines charged off the aircraft. The chief turned to face Jonathan shouting as a young captain ran up to them.

"Are you crazy? What do we need these people for?"

"We don't, Chief. They're here to protect this aircraft while we do the real work, and you will fly on the helicopter with us. And no more arguments," he said firmly, turning to face a smooth faced Marine captain running up to them and saluting.

"Sir, my men and I have been ordered to go with you to rescue General Sloan."

"Captain, you and your men," pausing for a moment not wanting to offend the young captain, "you'll stay here to keep anyone away

from this aircraft. The helicopters will come with us, but you stay here. It's best that way, and you'll be more helpful here. I've reversed your orders to cover you."

"But you're not military, and the President of the United States has ordered us to go with you to get General Sloan."

Jonathan looked at the pilot, and smiled, enjoying the moment before he spoke to the stunned U. S. Marine captain.

"Okay, you come, but the rest stay here. And you'll stay with the helicopters to be our communication link. That's all you'll need to do, and if you have a problem with that, I bet my phone call gets to the President before yours. Any questions?"

"None, sir," the bewildered Captain said.

He quickly turned on his heels and walked over to his men issuing orders. The Marines quickly took positions around the small Lear Jet sitting in a secluded hanger where there was no danger. And they didn't realize it.

Quan laughed and said, "He's probably relieved that he's not going."

He turned to face the chief and said, "Get your men over to that helicopter now!" he yelled over the rotor noise and pointed to the craft nearest to them.

The chief shouted a few orders; his men stood back a moment until he shouted again, and they scrambled towards the birds. The marines watched as the *Montagnards* scrambled aboard, wondering where they came from and why they were carrying weapons more modern than theirs.

Jonathan stood with *Quan* watching them board. The chief ran up to them shouting.

"Are you two coming? We don't have all night! Stop being lazy!" and he flashed his toothless grin as he ran to join his people.

As Jonathan turned to leave, he overheard one of the marines speaking to the captain who had decided to remain with his men.

"This is stupid. Those little people couldn't rescue anything. Look at them. No discipline, and their weapons are top technology and far too complicated for them."

Jonathan turned briefly and smiled. "That's why they're going with me and not you. At least I have a chance of getting the general out alive," he said, turning quickly heading for the helicopter as the blades rotated faster. *Quan* climbed aboard behind him, and they walked to the flight desk.

The marine on the ground shook his head at the rebuke. The captain said to the marine, as they stood watching the tall man dressed in a suit, disappear into the haul of the aircraft, the door closing behind him, "Those undisciplined men are *Montagnards*, and he's right," the young marine captain said. "They'll have a better chance without us," he nodded as he explained who they were from information that he had read in the ship's library. But this was the first time he had seen the infamous warriors face to face.

The helicopter pilot sat quietly and listened to Jonathan and *Quan*, following the coordinates that they pointed out on the map.

"We'll drop these people off and wait for them to get into place. They'll signal on the phone. Then, this is what we do," he explained and as he kept talking watching the expression on the pilot's face.

The chief stepped up to them saying, "Let's get this machine off the ground, so we can get back on the ground faster. My people are nervous sitting in this stupid whirly-bird."

Jonathan chuckled and said. "You heard the man, Captain. Let's get this thing off the ground. We're hitting ground zero now. The second helicopter is to follow, but he'll wait at the first drop off point."

The pilot nodded his head and spoke to the crew of the other craft. He reached for the cyclic and pulled on the collective adding power. The black bird jumped from the earth, and the *Montagnards* gasped at it went straight up, tilting slightly and heading for the coast with the nose slightly down as it picked up ground speed. As the aircraft picked up altitude, the chief had a cell phone glued to his grinning face as he spoke to his people on the ground. He finished talking and looked at *Quan* and Jonathan.

"We're ready. Ten of my people are on the hill where we'll land. The rest are near the villa watching, but out of sight. The guards around that place are amateurs," he reported, sitting down next to the

two friends and looking out the window at the darkness below, seeing only an occasional light in the distance.

He stood quickly and looked into the flight deck, and turned quickly before saying nervously, "They're flying this thing by those little lights," and he turned his puzzled head to look inside again.

"Yes, so what! You move in the darkness without lights, don't you," Jon said laughing at the old man's expression of disbelief.

THE GANGSTERS HAD BEEN LEFT BEHIND at the hanger under marine guard with strict instructions to the young captain, and they were to be obeyed.

Jonathan made it clear that if they escaped or were rescued, he would be in deep trouble, and a hammer would fall on him from Washington quickly. The captain had looked at Langston skeptically, but the Air Force pilot had cleared the air later by telling him that this was no game played by college boys. This contest is for real, he had stated, and they would be lucky to live through it.

The young captain had challenged the pilot's comments and backed down immediately when the pilot said, "You step out of line, or lose those prisoners, and that man will pull the trigger without thinking twice about it. We're here for a purpose, and you will obey, or I'll pull the trigger myself. I really don't give a rat's backside about you or your men. Do we understand each other?" he asked angrily, as he walked back to his aircraft, leaving a stunned Marine Corps Captain standing in the middle of the hanger looking for support. But there was none.

The pilot sat on the flight deck of the Lear Jet listening to the air traffic reports and heard the helicopter pilot's conversation over the open frequency.

"Three minutes to touch, Mr. Langston. Is it wise to go in without lights?" he asked unsure of himself, glancing at the little *Montagnard* standing next to Langston. The chief spoke without thinking, and Langston laughed.

"You go in with no lights, you dumbo. You put lights, and that sends a signal to bad guys. No lights, and stop talking. Land this stu-

pid thing over there!" he shouted above the noise of the blades, pointing to a hilltop moving up quickly.

The pilot strained his eyes and adjusted his instruments quickly, starting the descent, swinging the tail rotor blades sharply to head straight into the clearing.

He wondered how the little man had picked out the area so quickly, and said to Langston over his shoulder, "He's a tough little jackass," and stopped when an angry voice flew back at him from under Jonathan's armpit.

"I no jackass. I am no stupid animal; I have manners unlike you. Now, land this lousy thing. We have work to do. Jon, I bring one of my pets to play with him if he talks again."

The pilot pulled back on the collective, and the tail dropped, slowing the helicopter down. He adjusted quickly and found his mark, setting the helicopter down exactly where the old man had pointed. The second helicopter rotated into position fifty feet away. The door opened, and the *Montagnards* scrambled to their feet and disappeared into the night. *Quan* followed them, giving Jon the thumbs up as he jumped out the door, and hearing Jon's last words before he disappeared behind the mountain guerillas.

"I'll see you down there in less than one hour. Don't go in until I signal. And knock off the guards quickly when I'm ready to move."

The crewman shut the door, and they waited in silence. It seemed like hours before Langston's cell phone rang.

Quan said quickly and disconnected, "We're ready and in position Jon. Time to go and good luck my brother."

"Thanks, *Quan*, and *chao chao*. We're coming out of there soon," he said as he motioned the pilot to prepare. He dialed the general's number and waited for the third ring before it was answered to nothing but dead silence.

"*Tiep*, are you on the line, or is this your boss?"

The silence continued, and Jonathan tried again.

"Let me speak with Alexander."

THE WAITING GAME STARTED. Langston disconnected on the third attempt of silence.

The pilot turned, asking, "Are we ready to go?"

"Not yet. We're playing a game of chess with a professional of the cloak and dagger era, and he has forgotten that the rules have changed. The other helicopter is to stay in this clearing. We need a backup in case we have to escape by foot. Can you check on where that yacht is with your ship?"

Jonathan sat in the jump seat waiting, listening to the conversation with the naval ship ten miles out. The yacht had turned and was heading for the coast moving slowly between the small islands about five miles out. Jonathan looked at his map and pinpointed the approximate position, moved his finger towards the coast, and tapped the pilot on his shoulder.

He instructed, "Keep the line open to the ship's captain and the other pilot. Tell the captain to inform Washington what's going to happen. The yacht is filled with CIA drug runners. The other aircraft is to buzz the yacht and force it to make a move, hopefully, to fire on the helicopter. If that happens, kill it, and everyone on board."

The pilot turned his head slowly and spoke, unsure of his words.

"We can't do that. It would create an international incident."

"You do it, now," Langston said smiling feeling relaxed, an idea coming to the surface of his mind. "Have the captain obtain clearance now from Washington, if he has too. That helicopter takes off in ten minutes. Do we understand each other? And listen to my conversation on the cell phone, and you'll understand the next steps," he instructed, as he dialed a number through Dalat saying on the first ring.

"Tong, we need to shake *Tiep* and his boss into talking to me. Call *Tiep* on his party number from Hanoi in Vietnamese and tell him that in fifteen minutes the drug boat off the coast is going to be buzzed by an American helicopter. And tell him that if the yacht fires on the helicopter, it has been instructed to blow it out of the water, including all the people aboard. Tell him quickly that you're the chairman's assistant and hang up. Let me know his reaction," he laughed at the old warrior's final comment and laughter.

The pilot turned his head and smiled.

"I don't know who you work for, but I like this type of chess contest," he said turning to speak to the co-pilot.

He said to Jonathan, "When you're ready, we can take off

"We'll wait for a few minutes," he said, dialing the general's number again. It rang and rang, and no one answered. Jonathan's anxiety moved up a notch, as he was concerned about their safety. He almost told the pilots to liftoff when his cell phone rang. He answered, listening to a laughing eighty-year-old voice.

"I told *Tiep* that our conversation was being recorded for his mother and the next party meeting. The jerk was still yelling when I disconnected."

Jonathan sat back in his seat smiling at *Tong*'s comments but still concerned about the people at the villa. His thoughts flowed to *Tuyet* and the last night they had spent together, their lovemaking, and the excitement they shared being near each other. He looked out of the dark window and saw her visage float past, her smile and the dimple bouncing on her face under her sparkling blue eyes. He wanted to reach out to touch the image when his cell phone broke the spell.

He listened to *Quan*, disconnected, and said to the pilot, "Tell the other pilot to do some buzzing. Let's go to the villa," he instructed, dialing the general's number again, which was picked up on the first ring by a very angry voice bouncing from the mouthpiece at the villa.

NGUYEN THRANG TIEP FELT THE PRESSURE, THE NEED to lash out at anyone in his way. His brother stood at the other end of the room watching him carefully, no emotions showing on his face. His father was standing close to the general whose hands were tied at his back as he sat uncomfortably in an oversized chair. The man with the moustache and father of twin drug cartel bosses, soon to be reduced to a single son, reached under his jacket, pulled a gun, and placed it on the desk next to the general.

Sloan's eyes followed the movement carefully wondering what was the next step. Something had happened that upset the party man. What maneuver had Jon come up with, he wondered, as the old man

motioned two guards to come closer. He whispered something to them. They walked to the other side of the room near the front door, returning quickly, leading *Tuyet* and *Anh Phon* to the chairs opposite the general. They were shoved into the chairs before they could react.

Tuyet tried to stand but was shoved backward again.

Alexander said cautiously, "Don't force their hand, *Tuyet*. Jon will be here soon, and maybe he'll have a solution to this predicament with this madman."

Sloan's words were cut short by the sharp crash of metal against the side of his head. He slumped over and *Tuyet* screamed for the man to stop hitting him. *Anh Phon* tried to get up, but was shoved in her chest by the guard nearest her.

Serge Bernier and Frank Tan walked towards the rear exit hoping to avoid being part of the inevitable clash between the power merchants. They wanted to be out of the firing line.

Tiep turned quickly, as he spoke rapidly on the phone to Jonathan Langston, and glared at his father and brother. He started to speak again and stared at the dead phone in his hand. He twisted around shouting at his father.

"What is going on, old man? Langston is on his way here now by helicopter, and he knows about the telephone call from the chairman. The chairman's assistant mentioned my mother, and Langston knows about it. What is going on? We need to get out of here now because if they attack! We're finished! Which one of us is going to live?" he shouted again, reaching into his jacket pulling a small .38 caliber pistol, and died as a bullet hit him in the forehead from a silenced shot fired from across the room.

Tiep's brother walked over and looked down at the dead brother and smiled. "He's no longer an obstacle. Now, let's move out of here."

Nguyen Thrang Tiep didn't know what happened as he collapsed to the floor. He didn't know who pulled the trigger. And he didn't know that his mother had ordered his death because he was too high a risk to the cartel. And he wouldn't know that she was going to disappear from Vietnam.

The general lifted his head and stared at the party man, blood staining the wooden floor.

He turned his gaze towards the old man and said, "Sandhurst, you should be the one on the floor. You've created a brilliant strategy in the drug trade, and no doubt it started during the war. Very cleverly conceived and brilliantly concealed from everyone using your protected position in the governments," he said, lowering his eyes to look at the man who thought that he was heading to the top of his government.

But *Tiep* had been promised nothing by the man who controlled his life. The son had always been expendable to their cause, and he didn't know it. What a waste, Sloan thought, lifting his head slowly, feeling the blood flowing down his neck from his head wound.

He heard the words of his enemy, a man he had confided in and told about their search for the drug leaders through the bankers. But he had never confided in anyone about the foundation that he and Jonathan had created for the sole purpose of financing the destruction of the drug cartel. The words buzzed in his ears as the man Sandhurst spoke, and he was appalled at the steps the man had taken.

"Alexander, we're leaving in a few minutes, and you'll never see me again. Of course, you'll be dead. But before you die, you'll watch the women die, and then Langston," he said smiling, glancing at *Tuyet*, who attempted to move, but was shoved back by the guard.

Reginald Sandhurst, the director of the Australian Intelligence Organization called ASIO turned to look at the son known as Mr. N and smiled. His gaze turned slowly towards Retired General Alexander Sloan, his enemy, and he lifted his weapon slowly.

"I've taken steps to recover most of our money that the Central Banks grabbed today. Tomorrow, everything will be reversed, and you lose. And even the money that was grabbed by the Australian and American governments will reverse to our control, and you'll never know how it's done. Your man, Langston, arrives soon, and then we leave, but without you people. The helicopter bringing Langston here will be shot down when it takes off. Too bad for my old comrades in the spy trade, but you're not good enough," he said laughing, tilting

his head slightly hearing the whooshing noise of the helicopter landing in the gardens beyond the villa.

Sandhurst motioned quickly for two of the guards to go out and meet Langston. The other guards had secured the area, and he wasn't concerned about an attack; everything was monitored, and the risks had been minimized. He turned quickly to face his son.

"You know what to do if something happens to me. I'll meet you, if I can, and you know the location. The yacht will be here soon for me, but first there are a few things that I must do. Now, go and take your time going out. You have a long way to go before you're clear," he instructed, walking over to embrace his son affectionately. The younger man reached up and touched his father's face, turned, and disappeared through the back door without saying a word. No words were needed. His destiny was now his to control, created by the father he was leaving behind.

Bernier and Tan started to follow the younger man, but stopped when Sandhurst shouted.

"Stay here. You've caused enough damage. Now take a position over near the front door," he instructed them as he turned to face Sloan. He walked over and sat behind the desk near Sloan's chair, and the waiting began. Only one guard remained in the room with him, and that was all he needed, he decided, glancing at Bernier and Tan.

THE PILOT FLIPPED THE LANDING LIGHTS ON AS THE
wheels touched the earth. Immediately, he doused them, throwing the grounds into an eerie blackness.

The co-pilot said quickly, "I counted six guards, and they're all heavily armed. There are two on the veranda."

"There will be more in the shadows. Hit the lights again for thirty seconds, shut them, and slow the blades. Wait two minutes, and hit them again, and rev the engines as if preparing to leave," Langston said pulling an ugly .45 automatic from his jacket on the seat, and putting it in his belt at the curvature of his back.

The lights went on, and a lone figure went out the door to the rear of the helicopter at a trot into darkness. He reached the coconut grove

twenty meters away, and kneeled next to two men, as the lights were turned off. The chief smiled as he stared at the villa, his cell phone to his lips.

"Are you ready, Jon?" the chief asked.

"Yes, as soon as the pilots hit the lights again, take them all out. And no noise. I have to get inside," he whispered. Then he crawled to the far end of the grove, so he could easily walk to the front of the helicopter again.

Timing was crucial now for Langston and the *Montagnards*. There were twelve guards around the villa, and he wasn't sure about inside. But he needed to get there. He wondered who he would find. He looked at his watch as the garden turned white.

The guards on the veranda saw the lone man walking in front of the helicopter when the lights were doused. He carried something in his hand as he walked towards the villa. They slowly raised their automatics, prepared for action and died as the small steel arrows ripped through their hearts without a sound.

Langston turned his head slowly as other guards fell from the shadows, collapsing to the ground, not a sound heard. He stopped and looked around as he saw the *Montagnards* appear from the shadows, each carrying the wicked crossbow. The chief walked up behind Langston, spoke briefly, and disappeared to the edge of the clearing, his men spreading out.

Each step to the veranda seemed like an eternity, as Jonathan walked closer. He felt the breeze on his neck flowing in from the coast. His eyes searched the edges of the villa for signs of danger. He looked up in sky as the clouds moved slowly inland, the moon trying to break through the misty cover above the earth. His desire to run and break the door down to save *Tuyet* and the others weighed heavily on him, forcing him to keep the pace. Suspense will be the surprise, he knew, from memories years ago.

He reached the veranda and started up the steps slowly hearing gunfire off the coast. He turned his head slightly looking out to the islands and watched the tracers as the gunship strafed the yacht in the

darkness. A brilliant display of firepower, he decided. And then there was silence as he walked to the door.

He stood and looked through the windows and what he saw sent him into a rage. He wanted to crash the door looking at his friends held captive. *Tuyet* was moving slowly in her chair trying to send a signal. She was looking towards Sandhurst and the general staring at the revolver held by the other man, sitting behind the desk; blood running down his face.

Tuyet turned her head and faced the door. She nodded her head twice in rapid succession, and turned to look at the darkened alcove at the far end of the room; a signal passed. What is it? Jonathan wondered as he reached to open the door? He moved slightly looking further into the room and saw what he needed to see.

He picked up the small case that the chief had given him in the grove, shifting it in his hand, and touched the gun gently in his belt at his back. He released the latch gently on the case, holding it shut with his fingers over the lid.

He was ready and timing was essential now. He took a deep breath, hating this life that he had chosen, but he didn't have a choice, he realized.

He turned the doorknob slowly, pushing the door open completely, and stepped into the room.

"Reginald, you're a surprise. I didn't think that you would go this low. But, at least you have your two trusted friends with you," he indicated, glancing at Bernier and Tan.

Langston turned to face *Tuyet* and smiled saying, "I hope you're okay, my love, because if you're not, these idiots are in trouble."

"Cut out the politeness, Langston," shouted the French accent. "She's mine before I kill her. You can watch if you want, and this time no rescues."

"Oh shut up, Bernier, or is it Blanchard? I've been confused all these years. Does Sandhurst know about your real activities? He should. He's the one controlling you," he said turning to smile at the man behind the desk.

"What's in the case?" Sandhurst asked.

"Some things for Tan since he controls the distribution side of your operations. We're doing a trade, remember. As for Bernier, he needs to go outside with one of my *Montagnards* to get all the papers for the bank transfers. That's the real tradeoff, isn't it? They're at the edge of the garden in another case and far enough away from the helicopter so he doesn't have to be afraid. In a minute, I'll call one of my mountain men here to take him to pick up the bag, if you want them."

"Why should I wait? We can take you out, and they're mine anyway," shouted Serge Bernier.

"Because without me and my man, you'll never live to get them," he threatened turning his head to face Reginald Sandhurst.

"Cut the crap, Langston. We have guards all around this place, and we're free to move where we wish."

"You had guards," Jonathan said smiling, turning to face his injured mentor.

"Alexander, are you okay with this madman with the gun behind your desk?"

"Yes, Jonathan. I'm all right. I'm sorry I let you down," the tired shaky voice said, looking at the younger man.

"We'll have you out of here soon," he said, turning to look at Sandhurst, who was lifting the gun towards Sloan's head.

"Give the case to Tan. One of my guards will take you outside to get the other things. And by the time you return, the general will be dead, and then you."

"I don't think so, as your only guard is on the floor in the hallway now," he explained as he turned to hand the case towards Tan, who reached for it, and stared as a little *Montagnard* stepped into the open room.

Tan stared at him in disbelief shouting, "How did you get past the guard?"

"Easy," said Langston. "Now, open the case to be sure if you have everything, before I kill the traitor behind the desk."

Sandhurst spun around staring at the mischievous smile standing in the open hallway, holding the guard's automatic. He held his gun at Sloan's head slowly turning to look at the general.

"It looks like a stalemate, my old military adversary," he said as he pulled the hammer back a notch.

"Bernier, go with this little man and get the other things and bring them back, and we'll leave for the boat."

The chief walked across the room and out the door, as Bernier turned to follow, but stopped when he heard Langston's voice.

"The chief will be inside the garden at five meters. You're to walk to the edge of the garden, and follow the edge of the property, until you see the package. Don't try to come closer than five meters from the edge. If you do, you'll be shot. You're to bring the things back here, and we'll leave on the helicopter together. That's the only way that you'll get out alive with Sandhurst now that we know who the real leader is. If we don't come out, all of us together, the pilot has orders to blow this place up."

"You're bluffing, Langston. I'll follow the little man but if he tries anything, I'll shoot him," he said pulling an automatic from his jacket and walking out the door.

As Bernier walked off the veranda, Alexander Sloan spoke with a grating voice, tired and feeling the loss of the game.

"Pull the trigger on him, Jon. He's a traitor and deserves to die. I've done all that I can do to break them, and you must continue. There's someone else who's the real leader, and he's gone. You must track him and destroy him and this cartel. They're too big and destructive," he said, inching his chair.

"Be quiet, Al, and relax. We are getting out, and this man will stand trial, and so will the others. We'll break them."

"No, Jon," Alexander said feebly inching his way closer to the desk. "We all have a choice. I know what mine is, do you? Do you remember the choices from years ago when you saved my life? You have but one choice, my son," he said, twisting his head quickly as Sandhurst stood and walked around the desk slamming the barrel against Sloan's head knocking him to the floor.

"You lose, Langston!" Sandhurst shouted, but stopped as he twisted his head rapidly hearing a blood curdling scream coming from deep within the garden.

Frank Tan dropped the case, and it flew open as he reached for his gun. He screamed as the emerald eyes over the hood struck him in the legs repeatedly.

Langston turned and fired at Reginald Sandhurst before he could react, hitting him in the chest knocking him backwards across the desk, his gun flying in the air and landing near Jon. Langston turned rapidly and fired again, and the head of the monster disappeared as the chief ran inside the room with his automatic ready to move followed by other men. Suddenly, the room was filled with people.

The chief looked quickly around at everyone, lowered his automatic, and shouted at Langston. "Why did you shoot my pet, you idiot?"

Jonathan ignored him and ran towards *Tuyet* who had jumped from her chair to go after Sandhurst seconds before Langston fired. Things had happened too quickly.

In the distance, an explosion could be heard from the direction of the islands. A marine crewman from the helicopter charged into the room. But he stopped short when he saw the *Montagnards* moving around gathering weapons, and securing the room. They could hear the pilot revving the engines, preparing for a quick takeoff.

Tan tried to reach his gun on the floor, but the chief slammed his weapon brutally across his neck. He looked at the man and smiled.

Jonathan held *Tuyet* closely looking into her eyes saying gently, "When you stop crying, my love, maybe you'll hear that I want to marry you and get out of this racket."

She held him tightly. *Quan* ran inside, stopped, and stood looking at *Anh Phon*. He walked over to her and held her trembling body gently, then turned and smiled at the couple.

Jonathan walked over and helped the retired general to his feet, and they stood looking at each other, the old man reaching up and touching Jonathan's face affectionately. "The journey is not over yet my son. And it's entirely up to you to continue and find the missing

man and finish this unpleasant business. But marry her before you lose her again," he said, turning to look at *Tuyet*, tears running down his injured face.

Jonathan embraced his mentor feeling the relief and love from him. *Tuyet* held him tightly, her body trembling, and the tears flowed from the three standing in the middle of the room. *Quan* and *Anh Phon* came close to them, and they felt the closeness of each other from the memories of all those years that fled before their eyes.

Jonathan felt a tug on his arm and looked around and laughed.

"Chief, my old friend. What do you have in your mouth?"

He laughed, walking around distributing packets to his hungry men.

"Belgian chocolates, you ungrateful fool. Now, let us get this place cleaned up so you and my *Tuyet* can start working on that child for me."

Jonathan looked at him and smiled realizing that the *Montagnards* were a permanent part of him, and he wanted it no other way. *Tuyet* held him, and his life rolled by with her, and he knew that the old lady's gift to them was this life. The wisdom of those elderly eyes was beyond her years when she died all those years ago giving them a chance to live today.

Jonathan turned, looking at Alexander Sloan who had given so much for other people and asked nothing in return except for the love of the people in this room. And he had succeeded in achieving his wish but at a dreadful price.

"Alexander, my father, I was planning on leaving it behind after this was over, but I would never be completely content if I did that. At least, I'll have you and *Tuyet*, and everyone here to lead me in the right direction," he said turning to face a smiling chief.

"I'm not letting you quit, my son. And I need your children to help me to grow old gracefully," the chief said as he snapped another chocolate bar into his mouth. Without another glance, he walked out the door to help his people clean up the mess, and most importantly, protect his pets.

EPILOGUE

THERE WAS NO NEWS COVERAGE from any newspaper around the world about what happened in *Nha Trang*, Vietnam. If journalists suspected anything, the governments denied it. No intelligence organization would talk about it. They couldn't. And fear ran through the ranks of the most visible agencies. Everyone was being watched and suspected of being involved in one of the biggest scandals ever created.

It was created by top level military and agency people and condoned by certain ranking politicians in many countries. They were all behind the origin of the drug cartel activities, and they were instrumental in keeping a war alive for profits to line their pockets.

And that war in Vietnam had been a mammoth lie from the beginning. The only difference twenty years after it ended in 1975 was it now was a war against the drug lords, and it too was a lie condoned and protected by certain people in governments and by the bankers who stood to reap huge profits for personal benefits.

The laundering of the massive sums of money created by secret organizations dealing in death are now handled secretly by banks in an electronic era. And governments find it difficult to track the rapid flows of dirty money through the international banking systems, particularly when bankers make profits covertly on both sides of the deal. And, this source of big profit has to be protected through secrecy and deception, which is a game that bankers have perfected

over centuries. The drug cartels of this world need bankers, and they, in turn, need each other to keep their business alive and profitable, as long as governments do not catch them. And that's where the lies begin and end.

No one cares about the death of innocent children of this world who become addicted to drugs, which become easily available on every street and near school grounds. Money is the name of the game, and the source of supply and the financing of the drugs have to be protected until governments can step in and stop it collectively.

The business of international drug racketeering is too large, and the secret protectors want it to continue. The need for the huge amounts of money to continue to flow is paramount for economies, and the lives of people and children become secondary. And some politicians and bankers turn a blind eye to the corruption and destruction in societies as profits are made.

SIX MONTHS HAD PAST SINCE the outrage at the estate in *Nha Trang*. Alexander Sloan had gone into permanent retirement at the villa with the thanks of his government for his contribution in breaking the cartel and setting its operations back in time. But everyone recognized that it was not broken. The drug cartel had started its operations in this part of the world during the war. And they knew that it would become another war if any government tried to stop it. But governments were joining forces against the drug racketeers collectively, and were determined to fight and win.

"It was all started by misguided people during the war hoping to make a quick buck until they were sucked in so deeply that they couldn't get out," said Alexander Sloan summing it up after his last meeting with the President of the United States.

The President had launched a meticulous investigation with the CIA trying to uncover any clues as to the whereabouts of the agents who were involved the massive operation. The agents were on the C-17 cargo flight bound for Dallas Air Force base, but had disappeared in Hawaii during a routine refueling stopover. It was reported that

they had gone into the terminal to make a few phone calls, but failed to return. After waiting for one hour, the pilot took off without them.

Geoffrey Cairns and his Vietnamese doctor had been located in one of the estate cottages and rescued moments before the execution squad arrived. Cairns was later flown by helicopter to *Nha Trang*, and the Lear jet flew him immediately to Australia. Months later, Cairns was appointed to replace Reginald Sandhurst as Director of Asian Operations of ASIO.

Reginald Sandhurst's body was eventually flown back to Canberra and buried in an unmarked grave in the foothills. No one spoke about him, and the government was still trying to recover from the political embarrassment that one of its most trusted people could be involved in such a covert operation. When Cairns took over his new position, a number of top-level agents disappeared, and the hunt started.

Jonathan Langston and *Quan* traveled often on business for the foundation in an official capacity, but their real reason was tracking clues to the new leaders, and to block flows of money through the banking system. The original money confiscated by the governments six months earlier remained with the governments.

The foundation's exploitations of the cartel's money were used as was originally intended. Sloan was committed to his belief that the foundation's funds would continue to go to the victims of a war-torn country, which was the result of a massive lie by governments.

Everything had settled to a normal life at the villa in *Nha Trang*. There was no longer any fear of reprisal on the occupants. The chief had moved his family and some of his villagers from the central highlands to live at the estate and to be near his extended family. And he wanted to be there to protect them. He had taken a personal responsibility for their safety. And he had backup in his arguments from *Tong* who had decided to move to *Nha Trang* and retire from the game. At eighty-years old, it was time, he argued, and his family was here and not in Saigon.

And the two old friends had told Jonathan and *Tuyet* often that they wanted to be near their child when it was born in three months.

Leaving It Behind

She had argued with them and lost each time. She complained to Jon when he came home after a week's trip.

He looked at them lovingly and said, "*Tuyet*, I love all of you deeply, but never forget that they saved our lives, and they are family. If they want to stay, I can't argue. Besides, I sleep with you, my love, and only you."

They felt the charge of the old men as they rushed them, holding them affectionately. *Tuyet* realized that she had lost the argument but had won the battle for her men and now her family. She held them tenderly, unashamed of the tears flowing from her eyes.

And the Story Goes on

Jonathan Langston is a “culture-hero” to many of the South Vietnamese people whom he has befriended. Under the guidance of Retired General Alexander Sloan and under the guise of Sloan and Langston’s undercover organization called The Foundation, Jon and his Vietnamese friend, Quan, fight to destroy the drug cartels, set up during the Vietnam War, which are trying to control the banking industry in Vietnam and other countries, including America.

Factored into the equation is Anh Phon, Quan’s wife, and Tuyet, a woman he rescued from death when she was a young girl. During their escape to safety from the North Vietnamese, an old Vietnamese woman tells Tuyet and Jon that they are destined to be together. For both of them, after years of loneliness and unhappiness, Jon swears that this mission for the general and The Foundation will be the last, so that he and Tuyet can be together. What he and Quan, and his army of mountain soldiers, the Montagnards, don’t count on is betrayal by top government officials and the kidnappings of Anh Phon, Tuyet, and the general. Only through Jon’s shrewd thinking, and the help from his friends, is he able to save those who mean the most to him, so that he can strive to leave his former life behind and begin a new one with Tuyet.

Acknowledgements

"Gripping and hard to put aside, I was drawn effortlessly into the action which traverses the international financial centers and involves the unsavory world of the drug cartels. I enjoyed it tremendously." Ruth Downing, Executive Systems Analyst.

"This book was very engaging, hard to put down from my own personal experience of working and living in Vietnam. The author has a very good understanding of the various cultures of the Vietnamese people and their willingness to accept life as it is. The challenges in that world of deception in the international banking world and the drug cartels tested that acceptance. Where is the next twist? I kept asking. The author used an easy flow of different languages and cultures, making the characters believable." Father Charlie Robak - Hanoi Vietnam

"The author presents the atypical circumstance in a fashion that allows the readers to feel as if they are on the inside of the scenario - a fly on the wall, so to speak, visualizing the movie running. I walked most of my life with this man and knew his stories but I am now learning more about my father by reading his books. Thanks Dad." Stephane Guy McCoy, PhD Australian National University.



About the Author

John W. McCoy is an American born Australian citizen, currently residing in Port Douglas Queensland Australia. He travels constantly researching topics for future novels in areas that have been avoided in the past

He started his international travels during the Vietnam conflict, and his ventures into banking started in California after graduating from university.

He has worked for some of the major international banks in various senior positions over the past 30 years, becoming involved with many complicated situations involving huge bad debts, bank manipulations at senior and middle management levels and corruption within the system. His contract assignments have taken him around the world unraveling complex problems usually created by the senior bank executives, problems that they would prefer to be permanently hidden from the public.

He devotes his spare time to writing about banking mysteries that the public generally never hears about. His writing talent is based on experience, turning the stories into fiction in a world of realism.

Also By: John W. McCoy
Hidden Money

Soon available:
The Users
The Chief
The Road to Nowhere

**John McCoy, *Leaving It Behind,*
ISBN #: 0-9750441-8-4.**

An expert in the banking industry, John W. McCoy's talents as a writer make this a must-read for both those interested in the world of finance as well as those on the lookout for adventure and intrigue.
